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MATE OF THE JESSICA

A Story of the South Pacific

BY

F. FRANKFORT MOORE,

AUTHOR OF "WHERE THE RAIL RUNS NOW," "TOLD BY THE SEA,"
"SOJOURNERS TOGETHER," "FLYING FROM A SHADOW," ETC.

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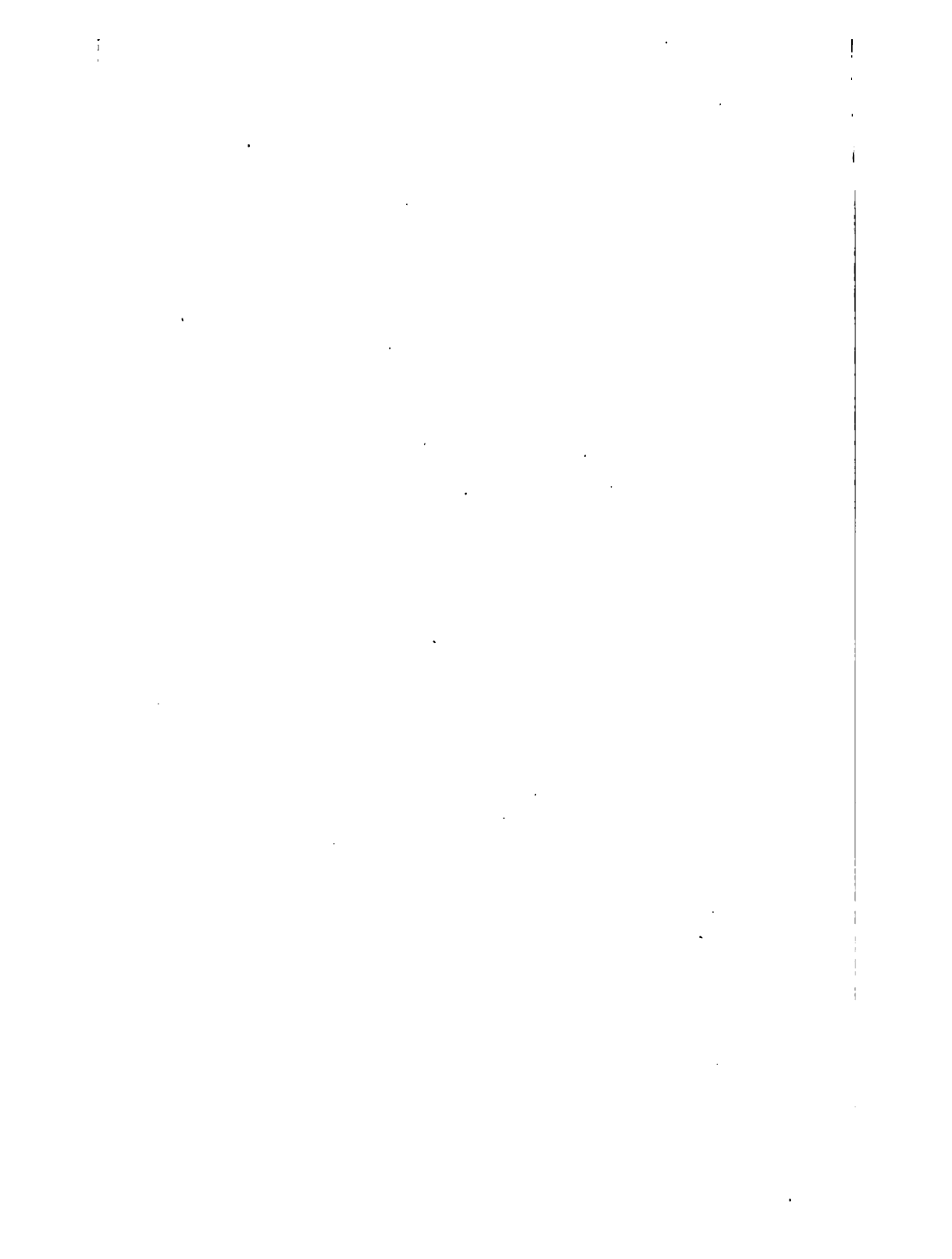
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MATE OF THE "JESSICA."

A Story of the South Pacific.

CHAPTER I.

Now that the ship had sailed into this ominous idleness of calm, Charlie had an opportunity of observing the sailors aboard more attentively than before. They lay about the forecastle smoking and playing cards all the long hot day, while some fished over the sides for whatever might come to their hooks. Certainly they were for the most part an ill-looking crew. The young man had sailed with those whom he thought coarse scoundrels, but the worst he had ever known seemed well-favoured in

comparison with these. The Lascars were, as has been said, numerous, and while they gambled their black fiery eyes glared like wild beasts' eyes at one another; but even these did not seem so bad as the Europeans, who might have been expected to look like human beings. The boatswain had picked the most abandoned men he could procure to suit his purpose, as he had confessed to Charlie; and now, as the young man surveyed them, he was forced to confess that the boatswain had been most successful in his choice. But bad as they were, Charlie felt that he would rather trust himself with the worst of them than with Stephens.

While he was engaged in this survey, arriving at the conclusion stated, the boatswain himself came up, holding a fishing-line in one hand and some hooks in the other.

"This is the line you asked me for, sir,"

he remarked quietly, and Charlie knew the man was saying this as an excuse for being seen with him.

"All right," said the young man. "You can splice on the hooks and tell me all you have to tell."

"It's this, sir: the gov'nor has been at me this morning again about his plans. He has made up his mind to get rid of the skipper and then of you, and I agreed with him. He thinks that the second mate can be twisted round his fingers, and I don't think he's far astray. Then he means to play a nice little game with the gold, if I'll back him up in it—of course I'll back him up in it."

"What does he mean to do?" Charlie asked quickly.

"Don't give the least start of surprise, sir, when I tell you," said the man. "He means to cheat the men of their share in the

plunder, and to divide it only with me. His idea of how this is to be managed is to provision the long-boat for two months, to put aboard as many of the boxes of gold as it will carry, and then for both of us to quietly drop astern in it some night, and run the chance of reaching one of the islands that are all about here."

"And the ship?" asked Charlie, "what about the ship?"

"That is the best part of the plan, sir. I have agreed to scuttle the ship on the night we are to leave. That will settle for the ship and the witnesses aboard."

The man had been a convict, and he communicated the diabolic plot without altering the tone of his voice. Charlie reflected that if the accident had not happened to this man, he would, in all probability, have entered willingly into Stephens' new scheme.

"That is all you have to tell me," said Charlie.

"That's all, sir: I agreed with him to begin the fitting of a sail for the boat this very day, and we are to provision it on the sly, from to-morrow."

"And where is the gold stowed?" Charlie asked.

"It's all in the compartment under the table in the cabin floor," the man replied. "Hang it, I don't after all like throwing away so much good luck," he added. "It's like flying in the face of Providence to fling away a chance of a grand stroke like this."

"He didn't think much of Providence when he ordered the ship to keep on her course with you lying stunned in the water," said Charlie, artfully, for he was afraid that the old instinct of the man would triumph. He had now, however, struck upon a chord which responded to his touch.

"I'm obliged to you for reminding me," he said. "Yes, I'll live to teach the blood-thirsty scoundrel a lesson. It'll be worth all the profit."

"Then I may as well tell you a secret," said Charlie. "You will not lose a penny by the transaction. You fancy the boxes in the cabin are full of gold; so does Stephens. You are both mistaken : they are full of lead !"

The boatswain had now need to be cautioned about controlling himself. He staggered back and stared at Charlie as though he had received a blow.

"Are you hoaxing me?" he cried. "Why, I saw the boxes shipped and stowed myself."

"Boxes of lead, I swear to you," the young man replied : and then he told how Mr. Longwood had altered his plans almost at the moment of starting. The boatswain's brow grew dark at first, but

gradually relaxed until the nearest thing to a smile was on his face.

"This is more than a joke," he said with one of his customary oaths. "What a fool I should have made of myself if I hadn't heard this. I would have joined that sneaking scamp in his plot to get rid of you and the rest, and after all, have found out that I was hoaxed. What'll he look like when he finds it out? I'd like rather to have a shooting-iron handy, if I was within reach of him. Hallo! there he is—looking at us. Hold the line while I splice on this hook."

Stephens had come out of his cabin, and was observing the chief mate and the boatswain together. Seeing, however, that the former was only having a fishing-line arranged, he turned away, but stood right opposite to them, leaning over the side of the becalmed vessel, so that they could not continue their conversation.

In a few moments they separated, and Charlie spent the remainder of the day in fishing, but so much was he carried away by his thoughts that he lost more than one hook before dinner time. He fancied, however, that he had caught, without the assistance of his line, a prize in the shape of a plan for escape—a plan suggested to him by the last plot of his enemy. He thought over it carefully for a long time, and it certainly seemed worthy of consideration; but, on the whole, he thought it better not to mention it to anyone until he should be more assured of its success.

He went down to the cabin to dinner as usual, and he was quite surprised at the prudence practised by both the young lady and her father when Stephens was present. Miss Longwood indicated neither by word nor look that she had become acquainted with his true character. She was, however,

very pale, and she scarcely ate anything. Mr. Longwood talked to Stephens in the most ordinary manner possible on the subject of the calm, and Charlie was delighted to observe that Stephens did not seem to suspect for an instant that they were in league against him. The young man himself had no occasion to speak except to Phil Carter, who sat next to him.

An hour afterwards, Charlie was sitting across the bulwarks when he saw Patsy, the steward, come up with a bucket and a gill measure.

"This is a purty thing, sir," said the Irishman, "makin' me work loike a slave when iverybody else is aslape or thryin' to slape—makin' a poor spalpeen loike meself go round to them thirsty blacks wid the grog that only real christshens can apprayshyate."

"What are you giving them the grog for, Patsy?" Charlie enquired.

"For to dhrink, sir; sure, what else would it be for?" said the Hibernian.

"But who gave you the order?"

"Why, the guv'nor, of course; you don't be thinkin' I'd be doin' it on me own responsibility; but it's too good for them half haythens, when so miny of me brave counthrymen is perishin' wid the thirst. But it's more of the Saxon oppreshun this is. We're a down-throdden payple."

But while Charlie indulged in a laugh at the humour of the man, he could not avoid asking himself what was the meaning of this generosity displayed by Stephens. He feared to think out the answer that suggested itself.

Just before sunset the skipper staggered out of his cabin, and managed after some hazardous windings to get beside his chief officer.

"Come here until I tell you something,"

he said, mysteriously. Charlie got down from where he was sitting and went over to the man. He had never seen anyone look so terribly wild. His eyes were staring and bloodshot, and they never remained still for an instant. His hands and, indeed, his whole body, were trembling and his teeth chattering. The young man had never before seen anyone under the terrible influence of delirium tremens, and the spectacle which the captain presented was awful to him. He stood beside the man, however, while he began talking in a whisper.

"You know why we have come to this calm," he said; "you know it is that I might be murdered because I said I wouldn't let the girl be harmed. I am to be murdered and cast to that old shark, which has been following us for days and days. You have seen the shark? I did. I've got up night after night and looked

down at him in the water, when the water itself was shining like fire; and, worse than that, he has come out of the fire to me, and stood beside me at night, making me drink and drink of that water until it blazed like fire inside me. It's doing that now; I'm on fire; I swear to you I am. That is how he wants to make away with me. But I'm too sharp for him—far too sharp, my boy." A horrible chuckling laugh interrupted his raving. "I'm too sharp, I tell you. Look here"—he showed, inside his waistcoat, a long knife with a point on it—"that is for him when he comes close enough to-night," he whispered; "that's for the shark in the sea of fire—that's for him—the forger, the fiend, the robber! Don't tell him—don't speak a word about it." He buttoned his vest and coat over the glittering weapon, grasping Charlie convulsively by the arm.

"Don't you think the best way to kill him would be to go over to the side and fling the knife into him?" said Charlie, a sudden thought seizing him to try and rid the other of the weapon. He did not know much about the man's disease, but he knew sufficient to make him suspect that a sharp knife was not exactly the most appropriate plaything to put into the hand of a patient suffering from delirium.

The madman looked into his face for a few moments, and then said, "You're right, quite right; I'll do it. Don't let us talk too loud, or he'll hear us. There! you see how he is lighting up the water, and he'll be wanting me to drink it after a while." He pointed to where the fire of the sunset was streaming along the sea, making it all aflame.

He then went cautiously over to the side and peeped over the bulwarks, beckoning

Charlie to do the same. The young man humoured him, following his example. But when he had looked into the water he started back suddenly, for there, sure enough, was the fin of a white shark, curving about the surface, and stirring up a little eddy which almost seemed to move the silent ship.

It was the most natural thing in the world that a shark should be alongside the vessel, the sailors having been fishing all day, and the refuse of the mess having been thrown overboard; but the young man, like all seamen, was superstitious—the shark following the ship meant, in his eyes, a death.

He watched the skipper gazing with wild, fitful glances, at the fish beneath, and then suddenly draw his knife and fling it with all his force into the water. The gleam of the sunset upon the blade made it

seem a flash of lightning descending, and Charlie, hearing the laugh of the poor wretch beside him, looked over the side once more, and there, indeed, was a small streak of blood upon the surface of the water. The shark had evidently been struck.

"You see, I was right," said Charlie, "you have killed the brute, so that you'll never again be troubled by him."

"I have, I have!" he almost shouted. "He is gone down, down, down to the sea of fire; look! the blazes are going away." He pointed to where the glittering sunset light was dying into the purple of the west. "Yes, they are gone; you have saved me; I can drink now without being filled with fire."

Before the young man could stop him he had rushed to his own cabin and, entering, had closed the door. He was undoubtedly

returning to the drink that had maddened him.

Charlie sat looking into the water, listening to the brawling of the sailors, who were still gambling by the light of candles that burned without the need of any shelter, until the stars appeared in the dark blue sky and the dark blue water, and he wondered if, indeed, he would ever be free from this ship, aboard which one terrible scene seemed to succeed another, making all horrible to him. But while these thoughts were in his mind, he could see a dark form stealthily moving to and from the davits where the long-boat was hanging. He knew that it was the boatswain, who was making the arrangements Stephens had directed him in the carrying out of the last plot. The boatswain was a convict, a robber, perhaps a murderer, and yet Charlie trusted him as he would a

friend. There were not many men he would have cared to see in the boatswain's place this night.

Shortly after midnight the young man went into his cabin and threw himself down on his bunk, having taken the precaution to secure his door, and, sailor-like, he was asleep in a very few minutes.

He could not have slept very long before he awoke with a great start, hearing the sound of a shout, then a groan, and a heavy fall on the deck. He sprang out of his bunk and began to pull on some of his clothes, wondering what weapon he could find to protect himself with ; but before he had got on his trousers he heard labouring steps upon the deck, and then a heavy splash — so heavy that the vessel was stirred with the motion of the ripples. In an instant afterwards Charlie was outside his cabin.

No one was to be seen but the man who called himself Stephens and one of the sailors. Both were standing between the wheel and the port bulwarks. Charlie advanced boldly.

"What was that splash?" he asked, quickly,

"We could do nothing beyond what we did," Stephens answered. "The skipper would insist on jumping overboard. He has had the d.t.'s for the past few days. I knew it would end so."

"Yes," said the sailor, "he jumped overboard. I'm ready to take my oath on that."

"But I heard a fall on the deck," said Charlie.

"Did you?" said Stephens, with a sneer. "Yes, he threw me down when I tried to prevent his carrying out his intention."

"Yes, I can swear to it," said the sailor.

"But why not make a move to save the poor wretch?" cried the young man. "He must be yet above water."

As he ran over to the bulwarks Stephens laughed, saying, "You needn't trouble yourself looking for him, he's dead—and buried."

"And buried?"

"Yes, young man; buried in the maw of that hungry shark that he thought was waiting for him."

"I can swear to it," said the sailor.

Charlie turned away with a sickening feeling of horror chilling him. It was a night of wonderful beauty, with the large stars glittering in heaven and sea on every side, but instead of tasting the balm of the sea-air he seemed to be drinking in horror. One murder had been committed,

he felt sure ; the next—when would it be ?

It was not a pleasant question to go to sleep upon.

CHAPTER II.

It was not much more than daylight when Charlie went on deck. He could not sleep in his cabin. It was stifling to him, not merely from the heat, but through the horror with which it appeared to him to be filled. About every part of the deck were lying the sailors asleep, and in the early light they might have been taken for dead bodies. The young man was the only one awake on the deck, and as he saw the others a shudder ran through him ; a weird scene in the " Ancient Mariner " again came back to his mind. He seemed to be a *modern* Ancient Mariner, standing in the midst of the dead crew, only he thought how preferable to his situation was that of the

man in the poem, who, as he stood upon the deck of his vessel, had only to think of himself and his own safety, peace, or misery; while upon Charlie was resting the safety of one for whose sake he would willingly have sacrificed himself. He had, indeed, Miss Longwood to care for, and never for a moment did he cease pondering over the plan he had devised for her rescue.

While he was standing thus, watching the sun rise over the dead, calm waters, striking the motionless ship, he was startled to hear a sound as of a gentle knocking against the side. He paid no attention to the noise, at first, but when it continued at regular intervals he walked over to the place from which it came and looked down into the water. It was some moments before he could discover the origin of the knocking, but when he did so he gave a

cry, and remained riveted to the spot with horror, for there looked up to him, from the water, the face of a man—of the doomed captain.

What a sight it was! Its awfulness could not be described, so appalling was it to Charlie. The face was purple, and the eyes were open, glaring upwards; and what made the spectacle still more ghastly was that by some unseen power the body was being moved at intervals, so that the head struck the side of the ship, and caused the sound that had attracted Charlie's attention. The origin of the motion was not long hidden; there appeared above the surface fin after fin, until all the water was stirred up in eddies, and the young man knew that the sharks were tugging at the body. But while he looked down with the terrible fascination which a horrible sight possesses, he saw upon the forehead a gaping wound

that could not have been produced since the man had gone overboard. Charlie knew how it came there; it was dealt by the hand of Stephens.

Then, suddenly, before he had been standing on the deck for more than a few minutes, he detected, through the clear depth of the green water, the white gleam of an immense shark, making its way to the body. He observed the fish turn over to seize it—he saw nothing more. There was an eddying whirl upon the surface, and a commotion among the beast-fishes, and Charlie drew back from the hideous scene.

Turning, he discovered that he was not the only one awake upon the deck, for behind him stood Phil Carter, having just left his cabin. He had evidently not understood the reason of Charlie's close inspection of the water, for he said,

“Hallo, Charlie, what is the matter ?

You look like a ghost, or as if you had just seen one."

"Do I?" said Charlie. "I have just seen something worse than any spectre that can appear to a human being."

"Let me have a look at it," said the other, going over to the side. "I see nothing there except—well, it does look like a tinge of blood."

Charlie shook his head. "You know the result of the row last night, I suppose," he said.

"I heard no row."

"What!" cried Charlie, "you mean to say you were not awakened by the fall on the deck, or the plunge in the water?"

"I was asleep and heard nothing. What has happened?"

In a very few words Charlie told him all, adding that he had just seen the wound on the wretched man's forehead, which

must have been produced by a blow given by Stephens.

The second mate was more terrified even than horror-stricken. It was some minutes before he could speak.

"By George, I believed him to be a scoundrel—to be everything that is vile, but I did not think him a murderer," he said at length. He then turned quickly to Charlie. "You are master of the ship now," he said, eagerly. "Why don't you rouse the crew and make them put him in irons until we reach some port where you can have him tried?"

Charlie smiled grimly. "When I have told you so much I had better tell you all," he said, and then he repeated the substance of the boatswain's confession, up to the latest point of the plot regarding the provisioning of the long-boat in order to cheat the sailors who had been Stephens' allies

so far. Phil listened in amazement. He scarcely seemed to comprehend the words, so blankly did he look at Charlie.

"And it was I who brought you into this mess," was all he said at the close of the story, as he turned away.

"Don't begin to talk such rot, Phil, old fellow," said Charlie. "You know very well I shipped of my own free will."

"No, no; you never could have known of it but for me."

"Then, before heaven, I thank you with all my soul," cried Charlie, grasping him by the hand. "I need not try to disguise from you, Phil, that from the day I first saw Miss Longwood until the present moment I have loved her: I tried to resist my fate, but it was of no use. I love her, Phil; and, please God, I shall save her from that ruffian and murderer."

Now you know why I bless the day I came aboard this ship."

"We shall save her, we must," cried Phil, excitedly. "If I should be forced to do murder to save her, I should not shrink from it. I remember how you asked me to swear to be true to you, Charlie; I thought at that time it was a piece of nonsense, but now I know that you foresaw some of Stephens' villainy. Let us shake hands again, old fellow, and swear to kill him, if necessary."

"If necessary," said Charlie, not without a smile at the other's enthusiasm.

"And I hope it may be necessary," said Phil, not knowing what he said.

Here, then, on the silent deck of the becalmed ship, in the South Pacific ocean, these two promising young men shook hands in sign of their willingness to commit a murder, and felt comforted in no

small measure by the action. If anyone, a few months before, had told either that he would be a partner in such a league, the mere suggestion would have been laughed at. Truly "time and tide" can accomplish a great deal that is not expected by men.

While the mates were talking together several of the sailors lying about the deck had awakened and were beginning to move about, each in his turn swearing at the cook for not having the fire lighted in the galley, that they might boil their coffee. After an interval, however, the much-abused galley-slave was awakened through the judicious administering of a few well-placed kicks. Then it was, naturally enough, his turn to growl, and it must be confessed that, though he was single-handed, he accomplished as much in this way as the others put together.

Charlie and Phil separated, each to have a wash, but this ceremony was one that the crew did not take part in to any observable extent.

Then, after breakfasting in their cabins as usual, the two officers went on deck again, and saw that the steward was carrying to the fore-castle another bucket of grog. It became too evident that Stephens was bent on carrying out his designs as speedily as possible ; his purpose clearly being to render the men insensible by drink, to scuttle the ship, and then escape in the long-boat, with the boxes he believed to contain the gold, and the man whom he fancied still to be his fellow-conspirator.

"Get me a line, boatswain," Charlie said, so loudly that Stephens could easily hear him.

"A fishing-line, sir ? " asked the boatswain, who was a little way off.

"Of course, a fishing-line. Bring me a few hooks also, and I'll splice them."

He made preparations for fishing, when Stephens came forward and sat at a little distance from the cabin, but he could only observe the chief officer and the boatswain anxiously engaged with some fishing-tackle, getting it ready to cast. They were talking closely to be sure, but it might be safely concluded that their conversation was solely about the arrangement of the hooks. But if Stephens had been near enough he would have heard as much as would have surprised him, to say the least.

"Have you got a hook that you think will do, sir?" the boatswain asked.

"I know what you mean," Charlie replied. "I'll tell you what I've found out: the skipper was murdered before he was thrown overboard."

"How do you know that, sir?"

" I saw the wound on his forehead when the body rose this morning. That's how I know. He was struck by Stephens."

" He was, sir," the boatswain answered. " Shall I tell you how I know ? "

" How do you know ? "

" Because I saw him do it. Now, sir, you must be more particular ; that start might have ruined us. I saw Stephens go into the skipper's cabin, and fetch him out. The gov'nor struck the skipper down with the corner of his own sextant. It left an ugly mark I don't doubt. Never mind, he's gone now. Well, you see I've begun to work out our plan."

" Our plan ? "

" Yes, Gleeson's and mine. I'm stocking the long-boat with cans of meat and bags of biscuit—I'm to get the rum for it to-night. Oh, bless you, the gov'nor and me don't do things by halves. We'll have reg'lar feasting aboard, and no one to trouble us."

"Listen," said Charlie, "Suppose I should ask you really and truly to go in that boat, what would you say?"

"I begin to take your meaning, sir. You think that if the gov'nor and me was to leave you aboard the ship ——"

"No, you haven't caught my meaning quite yet, I see. This is my plan, to be plain with you—do not say at present whether it seems good or bad to you: suppose you get the long-boat well provisioned and launched on some pretext or other, and that it bears away for the island with the passengers, the officers, and the boatswain of this ship in it, while the owner of the ship and his crew remain where they are—suppose I should suggest this to you, what would your answer be? Don't answer just now, but, as I say, think it over, and come to me in my cabin at eight-bells to-night."

"All right," the boatswain replied, giving the fish-hook at which he was working an artistic twist. "How's that for bend, sir?" he asked, just before he went away.

"It will do," Charlie answered, and proceeded to bait his hooks with a great show of diligence. When Mr. Longwood and his daughter came on deck they saw the chief mate fishing in the most unconcerned manner possible.

But the boatswain, after watching Charlie throw out his line, passed over to Stephens, saying in a whisper, "He little knows the way he himself is being hooked, my pal."

"Ay, or that he will be a bait for the sharks himself, before two days are past," said the other with a laugh. Then he added, "By the way, how are you getting on with the long-boat? You don't seem to have much stores aboard as yet."

"I was working at the sail," the man answered. "It's a sound job; and I've got about twenty tins of beef stowed in the air-tight boxes round the thwarts. The two casks are filled with water. I'll finish the grubbing to-night, and come to you for the rum to-morrow night."

"Good! Then don't forget to have the carpenter's awl ready in the hold: you can do the scuttling job when you are getting at the rum. The ship might be half full of water before those brutes find it out."

"It will, it will," the boatswain replied with a grin. "What a pity we won't be here to see the fun when it's discovered."

"Hush," whispered Stephens, "they mustn't suspect anything. Think of our risk: just two of us against them all."

"Mum's the word, my lad," remarked the boatswain, going away.

All that day Charlie continued at his fishing, addressing no word either to the passengers or the second mate. Now and again he looked at Miss Longwood, however, and remarked, to his sorrow, how deadly pale she was and how worn she was becoming. When he turned his eyes away from her each time, he could not help his bitter tears rising and falling into the bitter water beneath him. The thought of all that that pale, fair girl would have to suffer was an agony to him. But through all his pain there was still a throb of satisfaction at the reflection that he was aboard this ship to save her—for he would save her.

Mr. Longwood actually appeared to Charlie to be in better spirits than when he had come aboard the ship, for Charlie was not such a nice observer as to be able to discriminate to a hair's-breadth the moment when the acting of a part ceased and the reality began.

All this day the crew had been gambling as on the previous one. Occasional angry oaths were heard coming from the groups of wild-looking, unwashed men, and more than once there were fierce disputes, during which knives were drawn. The boatswain mostly interfered, however, coaxing some and kicking others into a semi-passive state. As the night drew on, and the third or fourth round of rum-grog had been served out, the quarrels got more and more furious. The men were now playing by the light of candles, and the expressions of their faces as they threw down their cards would, with the yellow glare upon them, have formed a series of studies for painters of the Dutch school. Altogether the scene would have seemed weird even to one who had known nothing of the secret of the ship's voyage.

This occurred to Charlie as he sat upon

the bulwarks and looked forward. But just at this instant a candle was knocked over by one of the men, who aimed a blow at another. The blow took effect, Charlie could see, and the next instant there was a flash of steel—another flash, another. The men of one group had started to their feet, and it seemed to the young man that more than one savage blow was struck. Then came loud interference from the other gamblers, and Charlie was about to hasten forward to try and prevent bloodshed, when Stephens appeared beside him.

"Stay where you are, you fool," he said, grasping the young man's arm. "Do you want to be torn in pieces that you propose to go amongst those men? Stay where you are!"

Charlie obeyed, and Stephens went to the fore-castle alone. Charlie saw him push some of the Lascars away from the others,

and it appeared as if they obeyed like dogs all that he said to them. He then turned to the men who had begun the row, and Charlie could see him gesticulate, and the echo of more than one wrathful word reached the listener's ear. Then it looked as if the dispute were confined to Stephens and a single man.. Both waxed warm, fists were shaken violently; at last the man's words became distinct.

"Who are you to talk to me like this?" he yelled. "We all know who you are."

"I'm your master now; you are in my power, body and soul. One more word and I'll have you thrown to the sharks. By heavens! I should have done it instead of wasting time with you here!" This was Stephens' voice.

"Curse you," shouted the other. "Haven't I as good a right to be master as you. I served once in the same gang as

you did, my pal Gleeson ; do you mind that ? And if I was a common house-breaker, and you a high and mighty forger, we were still ganged together. You'll teach me, will you, swell Gleeson ? "

" I will," hissed Stephens, " I will, with this."

And through that dead, calm night, over that silent ocean, there sounded the clear report of a pistol. Charlie saw the sailor throw up his arms and fall heavily upon the deck. When the smoke cleared away he saw Stephens standing motionless with his arm by his side, the yellow flicker of the candles shining upon the barrel of the revolver he had just fired. And yet Charlie was no more moved by the murder he had just witnessed than he would have been if it had been a mock one in a theatre, so callous, as it seemed to him, had he grown.

All was silent on the deck afterwards.

The smoke passed slowly away, and with it, apparently, all regard for the crime, on the part of the men. At any rate, they were as silent as the man who lay there with his face turned up to the stars of heaven, and his hands, which had so lately been clenched in passion, open and powerless. Stephens put his revolver back into his pocket and stepped into the midst of the men. In spite of the distance Charlie was from the fore-castle, he heard Stephens' speech distinctly.

"We are all sailing in the same boat, my boys," he said; "we are to have share and share alike, but you know you swore to be true to me as master until the right minute comes. Now that's part of my mastery"—and he pointed to the dead man; "in another minute we would have been ruined by that fellow's blabbing. I could not stand to see you cheated out of

your reward by him, and so—throw him over."

He was walking away when a voice called out, "That's all right, old man, we don't mind you bringing him down, only we want to know what you mean to do, and when you mean to do it; we've been twenty-one days out now, and we don't seem nearer our game than when we started."

Charlie saw Stephens look astern cautiously, and then go still closer to the men, explaining something in a whispered voice. Not one word could he hear, but the explanation seemed satisfactory, for Stephens in a few minutes came aft and went into his cabin. Charlie knew that if the sailors had not been pacified he would never have left the forecastle. There were knives enough amongst the men to overmatch the remaining chambers of his revolver.

Next followed coarse laughter from some of the men, and then, lastly, a heavy splash in the calm water. This was the end of the tragedy. The groups formed themselves again, and the cards were dealt once more. There was nothing to tell of the crime which had been committed. Truly, Charlie thought, men can overmatch brutes in brutality.

He awaited with anxiety the approach of eight-bells, when the boatswain had promised to come to him. He had gone into his own cabin, and was lying down on his bunk, when, a very short time after the appointed hour, the door was silently opened a few inches, and in a whisper the words came, "Your plan will work the day after to-morrow at daybreak." Then the door closed silently as it had opened, and the young man was left wondering if he had heard the boatswain's voice in a dream.

CHAPTER III.

A DIFFICULT task was in store for the chief officer of the *Jessica*—the communicating his intentions to those whom they concerned. It was easy enough to tell Phil Carter all that he had determined on, but it was not such a simple matter informing Mr. Longwood and his daughter.

Phil was accordingly apprised at day-break of Charlie's plan, and expressed his great willingness to form one of the boat's party at any time. He only suggested the necessity of crippling the small punt that would be left behind, so as to prevent the possibility of the long-boat being followed. Charlie immediately caught at the hint,

and said he would take care that it should be carried out.

The whole of that day, then, Charlie was seeking for the opportunity of speaking to Mr. Longwood, but luck was against him. Never did Stephens leave the deck while the passengers were there, and when the boatswain went up to Charlie with some herring-bait, saying significantly as he gave it, "Well, sir?" Charlie could only answer, "No chance of telling it, boatswain." Finally Mr. Longwood and his daughter went down the companion, leaving him fishing over the side as usual. It was certainly very vexatious, but what could he do?

A sudden thought struck him. He hauled in his line and went into his cabin and took out a piece of paper and a pen. Then, as briefly as possible, he wrote down the plan of escape he had borrowed from Stephens.

"If you agree to it," Charlie added,

"be ready to come on deck at daybreak on the morning after next, with Miss Longwood and her maid. Have all that you wish to carry away about you. You cannot have too many shawls and rugs. We shall have to endure many hardships on our voyage, but escape will be the result. Two days more here would bring to us certain death. Think over this for to-night, and if you consent to run the risk, please let me know by coming on deck in the morning with an open book in your hand."

After writing this letter, upon which all his hopes rested, Charlie took his fishing-line and went carelessly over to that part of the stern which was exactly over the cabin of Mr. Longwood. Then he quietly baited his hook—*with the letter compactly folded*. He let it gradually down the ship's side until the leaden bullet that served as a sink was opposite the port of the cabin.

Charlie allowed it to give a few taps against the side, but evidently it did not attract any attention. He then walked further aft with it, until it was opposite Miss Longwood's cabin. He suffered the weight to strike gently against the port, and then he lowered the line until the letter was at the same place. In an instant he was rewarded by seeing a little white hand put out and the letter drawn into the port. In another instant the line was released, and Charlie let it drop into the water so as to deceive Stephens. He knew Miss Longwood had got the letter and that she would show it to her father. Nothing was left for him to do but await the signal he had asked Mr. Longwood to make.

That night Charlie could see that the sailors were not in the same mood as before. Only a few of them were playing cards, the others were standing or sitting in groups,

talking earnestly. He guessed that they had taken to plotting on their own account, in opposition to Stephens, and he was convinced that no time should be lost in the carrying out of his scheme of escape. It was not from such men as these that mercy might be expected, if the passengers should remain aboard the ship.

At the first streak of dawn the boatswain came to him in his cabin, asking him in a whisper what news he had.

Charlie told him to notice if Mr. Longwood came on deck with a book in his hand; if he did so, the boatswain would know, without a further word, that all would be ready by daybreak on the next morning.

"But how about the launching of the long-boat?" Charlie asked. "How shall we be able to manage it, single-handed, unobserved?"

"I'll manage it to-day, sir," replied the

man. "I'll get the gov'nor to order it himself."

"Then if you see Mr. Longwood give the signal, you need not speak another word to me. You will understand that we will be ready at this time to-morrow."

"Another hour later to-morrow would be too late," whispered the boatswain. "The men mean to take the law into their own hands to-morrow, and to get possession of the ship."

"We will give them possession of it, for I hope we shall be out of sight of it by that time," said Charlie.

And so all was ready and waiting for the signal from Mr. Longwood.

Charlie watched for it anxiously. Every step that sounded caused him to look up. The boatswain, however, did not seem anxious. He sauntered about amidships smoking. At last the signal was seen.

Mr. Longwood came up with a book open, as if he had just been reading.

Charlie breathed easily once more, and looked towards the boatswain, but the man showed no sign of having remarked anything. He walked quietly up to Stephens, saying, "I'm not so sure that the long-boat is quite tight—at least, not enough for us. Hadn't I better get it put into the water?"

"Nothing will be suspected, do you think?" the other asked; but before the boatswain could answer, he continued, "Yes, get it launched: say that I am going to shoot some of the mollymawks," and he pointed to where the birds were circling about at some distance. "It will be as well for us to have a trustworthy fowling-piece aboard, and a good supply of shot."

The way the boatswain undertook to allay any suspicion that might arise amongst the

crew was very amusing indeed. He walked forward growling and grumbling against Stephens, allowing the crew to hear him do so.

"How much longer is this sort of thing to go on?" he said to a group of three, who were smoking at the side. "There that pal of ours sits idle all the day, and eating the best grub that can be got in the cabin, leaving us, that have as good a right to be in his place, doing all the dirty work. It's an infernal shame, and hang me if I stand it much longer!"

"What's he up to now?" asked one of the men in a surly tone.

"What's he up to? Why, he wants the long-boat launched without delay, he says. He's going to try a shot gun he has on the sea pigeons. I've a great mind not to stir a step for him. Ain't I as good as he? Haven't I as much right to order him as

he me ? " And he sat down on the bulwarks with a pretence of anger.

"Curse him!" said the man next to him. "He has an idea that he is really master, I do believe. We'll show him his mistake to-morrow."

"Is it to-morrow we are to carry out our plan of action about the money ? " the boatswain asked in a whisper, alluding to the plot of the men, about which he had spoken to Charlie.

"To-morrow night," the man answered. "Then we will be a model ship's company—all equal as we are by nature. We'll have no skipper nor officer. There'll be no superiors or inferiors here. Weren't we all born alike, eh ? If a man happens to be able to read and write, and work out the ship's place at sea, is that any reason he should try and lord it over us ? "

"You're right," cried the boatswain em-

phatically, "and we'll show them that to-morrow night. Just come and give me a hand with the boat; we needn't give him cause to suspect anything too soon. He would get a wrinkle out of us if we stood up against him now, and so he would be on his guard."

"Ay," said another, "we will let him have his own way to-day, to-morrow we'll not ask him for leave to let us have ours."

As the three men went towards the boat the boatswain could not avoid rejoicing in his own mind that he would be far away from the ship when the happy institution of equality should be in practice aboard.

Charlie, too, was not willing that the boatswain should be carrying off all the honours of throwing dust into his neighbours' eyes, for he went hastily up to where the men were unloosing the davit lines of the long-boat, saying, "What are you about?

Who gave you permission to launch the long-boat ? ”

“ Do you think we’re doing it for fun ? ” the boatswain said. “ No, young man, we’ve got our orders from our master, and your master, for that matter ; so don’t you hinder us.”

“ Did Mr. Stephens give you permission to lower it ? ” Charlie asked.

“ Ask him,” said the boatswain savagely. “ He’s behind you ! ”

“ What are you stopping for ? ” said Stephens, coming up with a double-barrelled fowling-piece.

“ I inquired by whose authority they were launching the boat,” said Charlie.

“ Did you. Then be good enough to mind your own business. I won’t have you hanging about the deck countermanding my instructions. Lower away, my men.”

The young man walked away, and in a

few moments he heard the running out of the lines and the plunge of the boat into the water. Some time after he heard the creaking of the rowlocks that had not been used for so long, and the ship swayed in the unwonted ripples of the surface. The boat had put off with Stephens, the boat-swain, and another man aboard.

What a relief it was for Charlie to find himself able to talk with Mr. Longwood and his daughter without a chance of being disturbed! It was, indeed, a precious half-hour for them all. Mr. Longwood was trembling with anxiety, and was only supported by the courageous view of the situation which his daughter was taking.

"I know we shall be saved—we shall escape," she said. "Even though we may have to suffer some hardships we shall be safe at last. What is there left for us here? Would not death be better than

three such days as we have just passed ? The companions of murderers and forgers ! Oh, I would rather be placed alone in one of the boats and set adrift than continue in contact with such a man as that ! ”

“ You will not be set adrift alone, Miss Longwood,” said Charlie ; “ you will be with those who would lay down their lives for you. You will be compelled to endure many privations beyond what you can imagine ; but, please God, we shall be saved in the end.”

He then gave the lady and her father some advice as to what they should bring away with them, and they parted with promises to meet and be ready to embark at a moment’s notice at daybreak, when Charlie would give the signal.

Charlie then took a careful observation of the sun to ascertain the exact position of the ship, and he found that the best course

for the boat to steer would be a southeasterly one. By taking such a course there would be a greater possibility of being picked up by a ship, and also a better chance of reaching one of the many islands of these seas.

At last the long-boat returned, and Stephens climbed on deck, leaving his gun under the thwarts. The sailor got next up, and the boatswain remained to cast up the painter to the deck. When he had done so he hauled the boat within an easy distance of the stern and then climbed on deck.

Everything was now settled, Charlie saw. Everything was ready for their escape. If they did not get free before sunrise he knew they would never leave the vessel, except after the manner that the skipper and the sailor had left it. As he looked aft and saw the pale, beautiful face

of the girl who was so surrounded with savages of the worst type, and thought of her peril, he vowed that she should be saved—he vowed first, and then leaning over the ship's side, and looking into the calm waters beneath which he knew he might soon be lying, he prayed that he might be made the means of saving her.

And thus the day wore away aboard the good ship *Jessica*, lying becalmed in the midst of the South Pacific ocean.

CHAPTER IV.

NIGHT on the ocean. The stars of the southern sky glowing in splendour from the dark blue heavens, and each finding its reflection in the mirror of the sea. Silence over all things of this world of waters—silence that, like the Egyptian darkness, might be felt. The white ship standing in the centre of the ocean, each of its topmasts pointing to a star, moved not from that star to another, so fixed was the vessel by the perfect calm. Aboard all was as still as if there was not a living thing there. All about the fore-castle the sailors were lying asleep—as soundly as if there was nothing but innocence among them. Who could ever be brought to believe that these slumberers

were about to awake to the crimes of robbery and murder? Yet it was so: they had gone to sleep after concocting their measures to take possession of the ship and the gold that they fancied was hidden in the cabin.

Then the light of the stars about the eastern horizon began to grow faint and became softly pale, and the waters, that seemed to meet the sky in that quarter, were gradually touched with silver. A tremulous movement, as of a white dove's wing, was perceptible in the distance, close to the water. The idle topsails of the ship appeared radiant and lovely, for the angel of the morning had sent a delicate shaft of light across the heavens before the western stars had died out.

The instant that earliest tinge of day-break appeared, a man arose from the bows of the ship and moved barefoot amidships.

He drew the boat, that had drifted astern, close to the side, and shortened the painter holding it. In the boat were lying the mast and sail and four oars, also a few small casks, a large tarpaulin, and several bundles under the beams, for the boatswain had not been idle during the early part of the night, but in the view of Stephens, and, indeed, with his assistance, had stowed away a large quantity of provisions and two small casks of rum. He had now scarcely made fast the boat when a soft step came behind him. It was Charlie's.

"Is all right?" he whispered.

The boatswain nodded.

"Then get into the boat and be ready to help the others down."

The man slid down the rope, and when he looked up there was someone else by the side of Charlie. It was Phil Carter.

Then Charlie stole aft and gave three

light taps at the side of the ship, opposite the cabin of Mr. Longwood. They were responded to at once, and in a few moments a muffled figure appeared at the companion, then a second, and then a third.

Charlie beckoned to Mr. Longwood.

"Go down the rope first and get to the stern to balance the boat," he whispered.

The boatswain held the boat close to the side, and with little difficulty the gentleman lowered himself and noiselessly went astern. Then Charlie lifted Miss Longwood in his arms as if she had been a child, and put her over the bulwarks, Phil standing outside on the small moulding that ran round the ship, to assist the lady. Without the least sound she caught the rope and let herself down. Charlie's heart began to beat now that he saw all on the point of being accomplished. Next came the maid, a slight girl, who was as light

as a cork in Charlie's arms. She was in a terrible state of fear, he could perceive, from the way she trembled like a leaf. He lifted her over, and Phil caught her by the arm. Then she grasped the rope and slid down to the boatswain's arms. All was safe, Charlie felt. But no! the boat was about six inches from the side, and the girl's foot went between the boat and the ship. A sudden movement of the boatswain caused her foot to be jammed, and she gave a scream of pain. In an instant the boatswain had caught her and pushed her into the stern sheets.

"Jump, for God's sake!" he shouted, as the deck became alive with figures.

Phil Carter was outside the bulwarks; he leaped into the boat just as Charlie had got to the top of the bulwarks. Heavens! the force of Phil's leap had snapt the line that held the boat, and had forced her a

dozen yards out, and at that instant Charlie's legs were knocked from under him by Stephens, and he fell on the deck. In a moment he was up, shouting madly to the boat, "Push off, for heaven's sake! save yourselves!" Then a blow upon the face knocked him down again, but he could hear the shrieks of Miss Longwood from the boat—then the splashing of the oars—the yells of the sailors. "Thank God, thank God!" was all he could murmur, before everything faded from his eyes—all became blank to him. He could not hear the yelling of the savages about him, nor could he see how the boat out on the ocean was becoming less and less, as it was rowed away by two pairs of strong arms, until it was no more than a speck on the horizon before the sun had been risen an hour.

When he returned to consciousness he found himself in his own cabin, the door of

which was open. Outside all seemed dark, except for the powerful gleam of the stars. He recollected all that had happened, and his first consciousness was a feeling of thankfulness—of intense happiness that Winifred Longwood had escaped. He himself did not dare to hope for life, but he was resigned to death for her sake.

But in a short time he began to wonder if he had indeed recovered consciousness, so strange to him was the scene that appeared through the open door of the cabin. There sounded in his ears the most horrible discord of pianoforte playing, and upon the deck were several tall forms of women dressed and bonneted, dancing with the sailors in a wild fashion. This was puzzling to him. How had they come aboard, he thought. Then he closed his eyes, and tried to make himself believe that he was dreaming; but still the noise of the

piano sounded in his ears, mingled with the shouts of the men, and the half-tipsy yelling of a song. What could all this mean? Who were those tall, oddly-dressed women? What was that bandage about his head? The last fact was the only one he could account for: he remembered having been struck on the head by Stephens, after he had shouted to those in the boat to escape. But who aboard the ship had treated him with such consideration was yet unexplained to him.

Suddenly there came into his cabin some one who was whistling an air with great contentment. Charlie looked up and saw that it was Patsy, the Irish steward.

"Mother o' Moses, is it aloive ye are, me boy?" he cried. "Faith, an' it's meself that's proud to say ye there, wid yer eyes open loike half-cooked oysters. It's plisenter ye'll foind it there than at the

other soide of the timbers, where they wanted for to put ye, bad luck to thim ! ”

“ I see it all now,” Charlie managed to say. “ It is to you, my good fellow, that I owe my life.”

“ That’s a thrifle, anyway,” replied the man. “ Shure I thought you wud be more comfortable lyin’ here than in the stomach of one of thim sharks.”

“ But the boat ! ” cried Charlie, starting up eagerly. “ Did the boat get off safely ? It was not pursued ? ”

“ Oh, faith, it got off all right. They rowed as if they were in a race. The gov’-nor gave orthers to folly thim, but, by the powers, the divil an oar was to be got at for the other boat that was lift behind : they had tuk all the oars wid thim. But what did they go off for at all, at all ? ”

“ To save their lives,” said Charlie.

“ Well, that’s not my idayah of savin’

life," said Patsy. "To lave a well-found vissel in a boat in the middle of the ocean is hardly what ye'd expect a company of payple wid any wit to do."

"Thank God they got off," said Charlie. "You do not know all, Patsy, or you would feel as I do."

"May be not, sir."

"Tell me all that happened after I was struck down?" asked the young man, eagerly.

"I don't think it wud be good for ye to hare it," said Patsy, shaking his head. "Ye must be kept cool and aisy, me lad."

"I cannot be so until you relieve my mind from its suspense."

"Oh, faix, I see ye're bound to have it, so here goes," replied the steward. "Afther ye were hit by the gov'nor—ye mind that, I'll bet—a rush was made at him by the crew, for it seems that they thought he was one of thim that planned the sloping off of

the boat ; but he was aigual to thim all. He knocked thim about him like nine-pins, and shows them down the barrels of his shootin'-iron. 'Ye fools,' he yelled, 'don't ye know they've left behind them all we want : every ounce of the gold is safe below.' 'We'll see it for ourselves,' they shouted. 'Come then, and look if it isn't thruth that I tell ye,' says he, leadin' the way down to the cabin, and in a jiffy he had ripped up a plank under the table, an' there, sure enough, was half-a-dozen iron boxes. They were weighty, I cud say that, for to lift one was more than any of the crew was aigual to. 'Now are ye satisfied?' says the gov'nor, and they laughs and claps him on the back, as if he'd been their brother. Faith it's more than meself can comprehend at all, at all."

"I see it all," said Charlie. "They thought that Stephens was going to betray

them! Thieves are always suspicious of each other. But the boat got safe off. Thank God!"

"Oh, sir, by the toime they come up from the cabin the boat was only a speck in the distance. Then I managed to git you in hare, though some o' thim was for heavin' ye overboard. Mr. Stephens was yer friend too. 'Let him be: he will have to be brought round to navigate us to a port,' said the gov'nor."

"I'm obliged to him for his consideration," said Charlie. "But tell me how those big women have come here," he cried, as he looked out and saw once more the gigantic creatures clumsily dancing under the clear starlight.

The steward looked out, and threw himself back on the chest, roaring with laughter.

"Women!" he cried. "Oh, thim's the foine lumps o' girls, an' no mistake. I'll

tell you how they come there : they all rose out of a barrel o' rum—all thim lovely faymales."

"What do you mean?"

"Shure ye moight have wit enough to know something of the thricks of sailors. They got up a barrel o' rum an' tapped it in a jiffy ; and, in another hour, they were busy rummaging the cabins left by Mr. Longwood and his daughter, and her maid. Then they came on deck wid the thrunks the passengers had left behind thim, and for a lark the sailors puts on the ladies' dresses and bonnets. Aftherwards they dhrags up the piano, and starts a dancin' and dhrinkin' to their sowls' contint, the bastes !"

"What !" cried Charlie, madly. "I will tear the things off those brutes that desecrate her clothes !" He had leapt up in his bunk, but the steward forced him back in an instant.

"What's the boy ravin' about, anyway?" he said. "What harm do they do to the gowns now that the young woman has left thim behind her? She's not standin' shiverin' below for want of thim. An' what good wud it do ye to tear off one of the gowns if ye had yer own heart torn out a minute afther? Lie still, me honey, an' make yerself aisy for a bit."

The young man could not fail to see the force of the Irishman's reasoning, and, although he ground his teeth with rage as he thought of the dresses which Miss Longwood had—in his idea at least—made sacred by wearing, being now on the backs of the villains who had sought her death and the death of her father, he lay still.

"It's gettin' too bewilderin' for me aboard this ship," said the steward. "I've sailed in many a craft in my toime, an' many's the quare thing I've come across,

but this turn bates thim over an' over agin. I don't know the maning of this at all. I've nivir yet seen the owner of a ship like this make himself a hail-fellow-well-met with his crew, an' such a crew too, all in a moment. What's the maning of it at all, sir?"

"I know the meaning of it but too well," said Charlie. "Some of us were taken in by him at first, but, listen to me, Patsy, there's not a ruffian among the crew that isn't an angel compared with this man who calls himself Stephens."

"Murther an' turf, what's that ye be a sayin' of?" cried the Irishman, starting up. "Isn't he the owner of the ship, anyway?"

"Owner!" said Charlie. "He is the robber of the ship. He is a ticket-of-leave man, like many others of the crew which he selected to aid him in his daring attempt."

Patsy looked at the young man in a bewildered way ; then a faint smile passed across his face, and Charlie heard him mutter, " Poor lad, that knock on the head has done for him ! " Then he turned to Charlie, saying, " Kape yerself quiet loike a good fellow, and in a day or two ye'll be yerself agin. Now don't be thinkin' about anything. The head's a tendher part to get a knock."

" You think I'm raving in saying what I did to you," said Charlie. " No, my dear Patsy ; thanks to you I have recovered consciousness—perhaps it would have been better if I had not done so, for what remains for me but death, or worse than death ? "

" Now there ye go agin, talking about dith and such loike horrors ! Give over that sort of thing I say. Ye talk of bein' grateful to me for recoverin' ye ; now the best sort of way ye can show your gratichude to

me is by gettin' well agin, an' not talkin' any more about what disthresses ye. Take another dhrink loike a man." After handing him the tumbler Patsy left the cabin, and Charlie saw him shake his head again, indicating his suspicions as to Charlie's recovery of reason.

The young man was thus left alone in his cabin to think upon all that had passed. He could hear the riot of the sailors upon the deck, dancing and yelling, and thumping the piano with more than the imbecile fury of savages, while above them the large stars were glittering with tropical splendour out of the rich dark blue of the skies. Around and beneath them the dark blue seas spread themselves abroad, becoming in the profound depth of the calm that had settled down upon them a perfect mirror of the skies, every star being reflected with marvellous distinctness.

What a scene would not this be, he thought, if it were associated with love and goodness! Never is the presence of the God felt more vividly than in such a silent calm upon the sea; out of the stillness of heaven and earth a voice seems ever whispering—a voice that thrills through the mysterious silence and darkness which overhang the great waters at night. Charlie Barton felt this as he lay in his cabin. He felt it, and he thought how ignoble man could become, since the wickedness of these wretches around him had transformed to a hell the scene that was as heaven for beauty.

Still there was present with him a recollection that brought some happiness to him, for he reflected that the gentle girl whom he loved with all his heart was safe out of the power of these men around him. To think that she had ever been

amongst them was awful to him. He wondered how he had ever been able to sleep aboard this ship, knowing all that he had discovered regarding Stephens and the crew. He hated himself for having ever been so careless as to go to sleep as if he had been in the midst of peace and safety, while Winifred Longwood was in the same vessel with those who were the basest and most cruel of their kind. Still she had escaped them—that was a thought of joy to him now. He did not allow himself to fancy for an instant that, it might be, Miss Longwood, and those with her in the open boat in the midst of that great ocean, were in peril of their lives. He did not reflect upon the narrowness of the chance there was of a small boat being able to navigate its course to one of the islands that were scattered through the Southern Pacific; he only thought, as he heard the laughter of

the drunken savages, "She is safe—she is miles away from here," and he was well-nigh content.

Finally, he reflected upon the last moment of consciousness he had had as the boat pushed off. He remembered that Miss Longwood had stood up in the stern stretching her arms towards him, and crying out to the men at the oars to go back to the ship. What a vision it was to him! It was enough. He felt that he could die cheerfully, having been granted such happiness as this picture brought to him.

"Thank God, thank God, she is safe—saved through me—through me. I have not lived in vain!"

And he closed his eyes to the scene of frantic revelry outside, though through his sleep there still sounded the shouts of the crew, who were dancing like savages under the stars.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Charlie Barton awoke from his sleep the bright daylight was streaming into his cabin, and all the air outside was glorious with the brilliancy of morning. He was in every way refreshed, and was capable of feeling thankful, not merely that Miss Longwood had escaped with her father and Phil Carter, but for his own safety as well. The truth of the steward's remark, to the effect that it was much pleasanter lying quietly in his bunk than inside a shark, made itself apparent to him, and he was sensible enough to take for granted the reports he had frequently heard of the many inconveniences attendant upon a residence in the latter

of the shadow as he lay. He lifted his head for an instant and saw before him the man who had proved the dark shadow of his life—Stephens. A grim smile was upon his face as he looked into the cabin and at the young man lying before him—a smile of conscious triumph that was hateful to see. Each man looked into the face of the other without uttering a word for some moments. Stephens was the first to break the silence.

“You’re alive, are you?” he said, with an affectation of carelessness. “Well, you may thank your stars that you are so, my boy,” he added with a laugh: “You’re in luck to be lying there instead of being on the wrong side of the ship. You’re luckier than some of your friends, I fancy. They would give a good deal to be safe aboard once more, that’s my impression. The ship had, no doubt, a good many blackguards

aboard, but if blackguards sail a ship all right I don't see that they need be objected to. What an idea it was to get off in an open boat in weather like this in the middle of the South Pacific! Fools and idiots that they were! I suppose it was to you they were indebted for the notion?"

Charlie made no answer; he only turned away his head from his enemy, and allowed him to talk on without interruption. "Ah, don't speak; it will not do much good now. I see that you are conscious of the mistake you made. But that boatswain was really so sharp a fellow I don't wonder at your being taken in by him as easily as I was. I saw from the first that he had his eye on that girl, and that he would need all the watching I could give him. But he succeeded in the long run. Well, well!"

Charlie had started up in his bunk at the

words Stephens spoke. He started up and stared at the man.

"What do you mean?" he found strength to mutter.

Stephens sat down upon the chest and gave a laugh.

"What do I mean? That's an odd question for anyone with capabilities of putting two-and-two together to ask, after what has occurred. Of course you know now that the boatswain has no more than succeeded in carrying out his own plans regarding Miss Longwood. Poor girl, poor girl!—Hallo, none of that, young man, or I'll scatter over the bunk what few brains you have left before you can put a foot outside." This last sentence he spoke on seeing the young man's eyes flash fire, and the young man himself in the act of leaping out of his bunk. "No; don't you try on any bounce here, young man, especially

just now. 'If you've been taken in, why so have I, and I reckon myself a sharper hand than you—a bit."

"Are you the devil himself that you can stand before me and talk so?" said Charlie.

"I've no pretensions to such a distinction," laughed the man. "No; your friend the boatswain, who wound you round his finger like a piece of ribbon, has a far better claim to be reckoned equal to so subtle a personage. He gave you a fine story about me, I dare say?"

"He told me the truth," said Charlie.

"As the sequel proved, no doubt. Oh, he was a clever fellow! He saw that the best game he could play was to take you into his confidence, and he did so with a vengeance. Clever rascal! Why didn't I put a bullet through his head long ago? I should at least have saved the young lady

whom I respect so highly. But it's too late now."

Charlie stared at the man, trying hard to read him through and through.

"Good heavens!" cried Stephens, "do you mean to say you don't yet understand your position? You are a greater flat than I could have believed possible to exist among men of the world. Why, can't you see you have been made a fool of by that man? He had from the very first designs against Miss Longwood, and I was obliged more than once to threaten him when I found him out. That was, of course, enough to turn him against me, and he, no doubt, told you a long-winded story about me, in order to increase your prejudices—I don't ask you what he said to you, it's all the same to me now. Then, no doubt, he suggested to you running off from the ship in the mad fashion he adopted; or per-

haps, as I said, you suggested the plan after he had led you up to it." Charlie gave a start, for he could not fail to recollect that this was exactly the course things had taken when the boatswain had spoken about Stephens desiring to escape in the boat. "Well, however it was," Stephens continued, "you agreed with him to go off, and to get the young lady and her father also to leave with you, and you see how it has turned out: *he* has got off with her—that was what he wanted—but he took very good care that you should not be of the boat's crew. Oh, he altogether hoaxed you, my boy! He managed that we should be aroused, and that you should thus be left behind. You saw, when the young lady wanted to return to the ship, how he only pushed off and rowed away the faster. Oh, he is the devil himself for cleverness! And to think that you didn't find him out

until now ! Certainly I gave you credit for more perception."

Charlie was for some moments completely upset by the words of Stephens. He felt his heart beginning to beat fearfully, as the possibility of having been deceived by the boatswain whom he had trusted so fully was suggested to him. There came before his eyes the spectacle of Winifred Longwood, for whom he had sacrificed everything, on board a solitary boat in the centre of that motionless sea. Was it possible that he had sent her to her destruction, he thought, with the words of Stephens ringing in his ears. His heart was torn with agony ; but then there flashed upon him the words he had heard spoken between Stephens and the boatswain upon the night when they did not know themselves observed. They had both been true to themselves upon that occasion ;

neither of them could have found it necessary to play a particular part ; and Charlie recollected that the subsequent confession of the boatswain had agreed with what he had heard through having listened upon that former night. No, he had not been deluded by the boatswain ; and this attempt on the part of Stephens to make him believe that the boatswain had played Charlie false was but another proof of Stephens' guile.

Charlie was on the point of launching out against the speaker in all the bitterness he felt towards the man before him, when a thought struck him. He would accept the challenge to the game of deception offered him by Stephens, and they would play it out to the last. He started up, crying out with an energy that was by no means simulated, "Have I been deceived? Have I been duped once more by that scoundrel?"

His voice unquestionably did not lack vehemence, he almost shrieked out his words; most actors, at the beginning of their profession, err on the side of extravagance.

Stephens was taken in by his vehemence. The young man was not so excited as to be unable to notice the gleam of satisfaction in his foe's eyes as he shook his head, answering, "I fear there is no doubt about the matter, my lad; we have both been swindled by the old confidence game that fellow was so fond of playing. But it's too late now."

Charlie threw himself back and buried his face in his hands, crying, "Too late! too late! I have sent her to destruction! Her death will be required at my hands! Oh, idiot that I was!"

He was convinced that he was really acting his part very cleverly; and so he

undoubtedly was, though, of course, a good critic would say that he was exaggerating the character he meant to represent. In a few moments he looked up with a piteous face at Stephens.

"What can we do? What can we do?" he asked. "You have been the first to discover how I was taken in, and will you not say what we can do to try and repair the damage I did in my stupidity? Surely we can do something! I shall go mad unless you can give me some hope."

"Pray calm yourself," said Stephens. "You have indeed made a terrible and, I fear, a fatal mistake, but I do not think you were altogether to blame. You came aboard this ship with strange prejudices against me, and that man played upon your prejudices. He was too accomplished a rogue for you."

"But the remedy—the remedy!" cried

Charlie. Surely we can do something to save them—to save her."

Stephens shook his head. "What can we do?" he said. "Here we are in this dead calm now, unable to propel ourselves an inch. And, what is much worse too, the crew have become quite demoralized since the passengers and the second mate went off as they did. I have been utterly unable to keep them sober. The restraint upon them for so long was too great, and now they have run into the opposite extreme. I don't know how this is to end at all."

He was speaking and looking as seriously as possible, and Charlie acknowledged that he was a wonderful actor. Then there was a pause, broken only by the sound of a song sung in a drunken voice by one of the sailors on the deck.

"Stay," said Stephens, suddenly, as if a thought had just struck him. "Of course

it is impossible for us to do anything while we are in this calm, but when it gives way we can at least take some steps to retrieve your error. What course did the boatswain say he would make in the boat?"

The question came upon Charlie suddenly, and for an instant he was taken aback—only for an instant, however, for he found a lie upon his lips in another second. "What course?" he repeated. "Why, back to New Zealand, to be sure. The boat is to go to the nearest port in New Zealand."

"Ah, that he agreed upon with you. Well, then, that proves conclusively that the course he has taken is in the opposite direction, as I suspected. If you agreed to one course, he will be sure to take a different one to escape effectually. There can be no doubt about that."

"Certainly, certainly; I see that," said Charlie, reflectively.

"Then I can with equal confidence assert that the course of the boat will be due south, or almost so, for the track of ships to San Francisco is but a few degrees south of our present position. His design is to be picked up, with whoever is left in the boat, by one of these ships. Our best plan, therefore, is to get as soon as possible to 'Frisco, where we can quietly await his arrival and confront him. That is our only plan."

Charlie wondered whether Mr. Stephens believed him to be the fool he pretended to take him for; for such a shallow and inconsistent arrangement had probably never been suggested to anyone gifted with an average amount of perception.

"You think they would have taken the course south?" he enquired, after appearing to be buried in reflection for some time.

"It is as clear to me as anything in the world can be," Stephens replied.

"Then I certainly think that your plan is the best for us to pursue. We will be sure to arrive at San Francisco long before any vessel that may happen to pick up the boat. But it is only a chance—a small chance that it will be picked up."

"It is by no means a small chance," said Stephens. "On the contrary, I see no reason why we should not carry out our plans successfully. You can navigate the ship to 'Frisco as well as to England."

"Of course I can," said Charlie. "But it is useless to talk of navigating a ship so long as it is in the middle of such a calm as this. And you think that there is really some hope of the boat being picked up?" he added, with an affectation of eagerness.

"There is not only hope, but assurance. I know the boatswain well enough by this

time. I knew he would try and throw you off your guard as to his course. If he said New Zealand, you may depend upon it he is gone in another direction. Now you must acknowledge that your prejudices against me were ill-founded," continued Stephens in the most friendly tone of voice imaginable. "You did not see, as I did, what a scoundrel that man was. You did not know the trouble I was at, day and night, to keep watch over him. His brutal infatuation kept me in a constant state of alarm."

"Forgive me, sir," said Charlie, turning aside his head, with a clever show of emotion. "I was cheated—duped—blinded by him. Pray forgive me, and let my conduct in the future atone for the past."

"Enough," said Stephens, graciously. "I will not upbraid you. You have suffered enough to atone for what is, after all, only

an error of judgment. Now I must do my best to bring round the men to something like order."

He left the cabin, taking particular care to close the door behind him. Charlie listened for the sound of his departing footsteps, but failed to detect any sound ; and from this fact he knew that his friend Mr. Stephens was surveying the cabin through the key-hole. Charlie, consequently, kept his head averted, leaning in the most thoughtful attitude upon his hand. In a short time he could hear the stealthy steps of Stephens going away, and Charlie was at ease, knowing that the view he had obtained of the interior of the little cabin must have been very satisfactory.

Charlie then ventured out of his bunk, and thought that he might profitably spend a few minutes in surveying the deck through the same medium of the keyhole. He

knelt down and put his eye to the opening, and what came within his line of vision was very satisfactory to him also, for there he saw Stephens standing leaning up against the mainmast with three of the crew in front of him, listening to something he had to tell them—some story, that needed, as it seemed, a good deal of gesture in the direction of Charlie's cabin, and a good deal of half-drunken laughter from the audience.

CHAPTER VI.

CHARLIE BARTON, chief mate, as he lay in his bunk, had not much difficulty in understanding what was the subject of the narrative that called for such merriment on the part of Mr. Stephens and those of the crew whom he was addressing. He knew that the title of the story might, with reason, be "The Gullibility of Mankind." Stephens was, he knew, repeating to the men how he had taken in the chief officer of the vessel, and had got him to agree to navigate her to a port which was then notorious for being the harbour of the vagabondism of both the Old and the New World.

Charlie, in spite of the serious position

he was placed in, could not avoid a grim smile of gratification at having taken in such a man as Stephens. He felt he had played his part well, for certainly Stephens was deceived.

And what a clumsy explanation was that with which Stephens had come to him! How could he ever expect that such a solution of his conduct should satisfy a man possessed of any reasoning power whatever? Surely no boy would be taken in by such a story as Stephens had told him regarding the boatswain! If Charlie considered that his intellect had been insulted by Stephens' asking him to accept the falsehood, he comforted himself with the assurance that his faculties had fully avenged the insult.

But to what end had he cheated Stephens? he asked himself in the course of the day; and it must be confessed that he did not

feel very exultant when he thought of how he was aboard this ship, and in the power of a crew of desperadoes. He knew that he was safe so long as his services were needed for the navigation of the vessel, but he was equally well aware that the instant his presence became embarrassing to Stephens it would be dispensed with in the same way as the unfortunate skipper and the insubordinate sailor had been disposed of—a blow on the head—a splash—the twinkling of a shark's fin—that would be all; and it might take place at the Golden Gate of San Francisco harbour, just after he had navigated the ship across the ocean, so that the ruffians should be able to sell the ship, or make away with her at the port without fear of detection.

These, on the whole, were not very consoling thoughts for one in his position to entertain. But as he had not dared to hope

for anything but death since he had seen the boat and its living freight push off from the side of the ship, leaving him on the deck, he could not but feel now that such a respite as was granted him was a boon for which he had cause to be thankful. If a breeze should spring up that very day it would still be a month before San Francisco could be reached, and in this space of time what might not occur?

In the course of the day, Patsy, the steward, came with some dinner for him.

"Well, Patsy," said Charlie, "how are things shaping themselves now? Has the cask of rum been emptied yet?"

"Faith, the greather part of it's gone," said Patsy. "But they don't seem near so eager to get to the bottom, now that the daylight's come. They were brave enough through the noight wid their dancin' and piany-fortin', but now they've slacked a bit,

thim that's slept off last night's tear ; but thim that's not sober yet isn't satisfied without goin' to exthremes, an' sure enough they're amusin' themselves wid pint pots, bad luck to thim ! They'll all be purty muddled before noight, I'm thinkin'. Well, I'm hopin' yerself is bettther," he continued.

" I feel almost myself again, Patsy, thanks to your care. If only a breeze of wind should come, I'd soon take myself off the sick list."

" Ye'll be the bettther for the slape ye've had, I'm thinkin', for ye were beginnin' to talk moighty quare like, when I left ye. It samed that ye had come to think of the gov'nor and all the crew in anything but a complimentary way. At layste, ye didn't spake much that was good of thim."

" Ah, yes," said Charlie ; " but Mr. Stephens has been with me since, and he has talked a good deal to me about the

crew and other matters. Did I say anything to you about him, Patsy?"

"Say anything? Oh, ye said a lot— as much as would thransport ye if we were at home in a respectable counthry. Ye did talk a bit wild, to be sure; but I knew it was yer head, and not yer heart, that was spakin' about ruffins and the loike. Nivir moind, me lad; ye'll not be tould on. Now, ate yer dinner, and don't say no word to nobody."

Charlie felt how very excellent was this advice, and he accepted it in the spirit in which it was offered. He ate what the good fellow had brought to him, and he held his tongue. Patsy, however, did not seem to think it necessary to put such a restriction upon himself. He sat himself down upon the sea-chest, and entered into a long series of complaints regarding his own condition aboard the

ship. It was hard upon him, he thought, to be denied the luxury of getting drunk, which was freely extended to the members of the crew. It was rather hard on him to be compelled to provide the means of getting drunk to the seamen, and yet to be himself forced to abstain.

"If I'd only bane born a sayman it wud ha' bane all right now, and I cud injoy meself in the calm loike the rest of thim ; but hivin's decrade that I shud be a slave, and I'll have to slave it to the ind."

"It's very hard indeed for you," said Charlie.

Thus Patsy mourned while Charlie continued at his dinner. It certainly did not appear that the steward suspected the honesty of Mr. Stephens.

Though Charlie's hurt was not great enough to have caused him to keep to his cabin any longer, yet he thought it as well

to remain *perdu* all the day ; so he lay in his bunk thinking many things—wondering where that boat which contained all he held dear on earth was now floating. Was *she* thinking of him who had sacrificed himself for her sake ? Was she indeed saved, or had he merely sent her from danger to death in reality ? These thoughts occupied him until the evening ; and as the ship lay motionless, east and west, he was able to look out at the sunset as it spread itself for leagues along the sky and across the wide waters. The sun went down like a ball of fire into the ocean, and the waters seemed to seethe and boil on his descent. As the long, level rays swept over the ship, and passed, broadening, along to the east, the young man lying there breathed a prayer for the safety of her who was, perhaps, looking at the same sunset with thoughts of him.

All at once there returned to him the remembrance of the melody he had heard Miss Longwood sing the first morning he had awakened aboard the ship. It seemed breathed once more about him by some spirit of the sunset. Upon that morning it had brought back to him visions of the home he had abandoned long ago ; and now the same memories returned to him, and with them much sweeter recollections. Every moment he had seen Miss Longwood passed before his mind again, and, for the hour, he was happy — happy, though he knew he might never see her again in this world — happy, though he was alone in the midst of a crew of seamen who were only held in check through the force of one worse than all of them.

With the starlight a fresh scene of revelry began amongst the sailors, and they continued dancing and singing as before, both

branches of art being, of course, inspired by the contents of the cask. In the midst of all, however, Charlie went quietly to sleep, and did not awaken until the morning.

He now felt that he could not continue in his cabin any longer, so he arose and dressed himself, having removed the bandage from his head. He found the deck strewn over with sleeping sailors, but he did not disturb them. It seemed to him that a year of his life had passed since he had last stood upon this deck, and the event that had taken place three days before appeared to be one of the most distant recollections of his life, so great a change had come over all.

The entire ship looked strange to him ; but he was completely bewildered when, as he leaned carelessly over the ship's stern, where the name "*Jessica*, Hull," had been painted in black letters upon a yellow

ground, he now saw, in white letters on a black ground, the name "*Ocean Sprite*, Bristol."

The young man gave a start, as well he might. Was he really dreaming still? he asked himself. Was he not aboard of the ship *Jessica*, of Hull, and how did he come to be transferred to the *Ocean Sprite*, of Bristol? Surely such a transfer could not have taken place while he was asleep. Or had the blow he received from Stephens brought about a change upon his brain, to cause him to imagine strange things?

He looked from the name on the stern to that on the small boat which remained, and upon the boat also he saw the name *Ocean Sprite*. Upon the two life-buoys was also the same name, so that the young man was completely mystified. The Irish steward, however, chanced to be passing across the deck, and to him Charlie applied for in-

formation as to the origin of the phenomenon.

"Come here for a moment, Patsy," he said; and the man came to his side. "Do you notice anything strange about that?" he asked, pointing to the name on one of the buoys.

"Sthrange? There's nothin' sthrange about it," said Patsy, looking at him with a puzzled expression.

"What!" cried Charlie. "Do you mean to tell me that that is the name of this ship?"

"Of course it is. What else would it be?"

"Do you mean to tell me that the name of this ship is the *Ocean Sprite*?" said Charlie, almost angrily.

"Ah, ye oughtn't to have come out of yer bunk for a while yet," said the steward, after a pause, in which he looked

at Charlie with an unpleasant significance.

"Ye should have kept the cold water to yer head till ye were quoite roight again, sir."

"Surely you do not mean to tell me that the *Ocean Sprite* is the name of the vessel you joined?" said Charlie.

"Now be aisy, sir," said Patsy, soothingly. "Sure ye know it's the *Jessica*; but if ye say it's anything I'll agray with ye; for a knock on the head is loike enough to make a body disremember even his own name, let alone the name of a ship."

"Then, if the ship is the *Jessica*, what is the meaning of that name?" said Charlie, triumphantly pointing to the letters on the circle of the buoy.

The man surveyed the name for a considerable time in a highly critical manner. "What does it mane?" he repeated. "Why it manes the *Jessica*, to be sure."

"Why, my goodness, can't you see that it spells '*Ocean Sprite*'?"

"Och, the spellin's another matther intoirely. I'm not goin' to set up for a scholar to say anything about the spellin'. All I know is that it manes the *Jessica*, no matter what it spells. The man that painted it yesterday is up for'ard, and he'll tell ye all about it if ye want to know."

"Yesterday? Was it painted yesterday?"

"A dale of paintin' was done yesterday by the gov'nor's direction," replied the man; "but if ye'll take my advice, ye'll go back to yer bunk and lie still for a couple of days yet. The head's a bad part to get a knock on, an' it takes a dale o' docthorin' to make it all roight."

Charlie could not help laughing at the expression on the Irishman's face. He

evidently was under the impression that Charlie's brains were not capable of a prolonged effort just at present, owing to the fact of his not having recovered from the effects of Stephens' blow. It was also evident that the steward carefully shirked entering into the question of the spelling of the name. He had, beyond doubt, no suspicion that the name upon the buoy had been tampered with. The fact of his having alluded to the painting as being done the previous day, however, showed Charlie the true state of things: Stephens had resolved that, in case of such an accident as meeting with another ship—perhaps an English man-of-war—no trace of the name *Jessica* should be found about the vessel. The name *Ocean Sprite* would excite no suspicion in the minds of those persons who might chance to have heard something regarding the history of a vessel called the

Jessica. Clever, scheming, cautious as ever, Charlie recognised him to be, and he could only wonder at the combination of good fortune and care which had enabled him, Charlie, to cheat this consummate professor of knavery.

By-and-by, Stephens came out of his cabin, without bearing the least of those traces of intoxication that were to be seen upon nearly every member of the crew. He, beyond doubt, saw the necessity for strict sobriety on his part, now that the men had made themselves masters of the rum-cask. Drunkenness does not, as a rule, accompany the worst forms of crime. There is a sober-minded, ingenious wickedness that is far more to be dreaded than the ordinary sin of intoxication.

Stephens accosted him cheerfully. "How are you to-day, my boy?" he asked. "I'm glad to see you on deck, and I hope that

your influence may affect the men. At present they are in a state of disorder approaching mutiny. It is this accursed calm that is doing it all. The men have no work to do, and they think they may as well make beasts of themselves."

"And it is possible that the calm may not break up for some weeks still," remarked Charlie. "I have heard that a calm in this region often lasts for six weeks."

"Then," said Stephens, "we may as well put a match to the barrel of gunpowder below, and send the ship and the whole of us into kingdom come, for another week of this sort of thing will land us all there."

He turned away with an oath against the calm, and Charlie was left to watch the men awakening by turns, where they were lying upon the deck fore and aft. The traces of their night's carouse remained with them, rendering them more than

usually forbidding of aspect ; and the young man shuddered as he thought of living in the same floating prison with them for another week. Surely it would be infinitely better to do as Stephens had said—to put a match to the gunpowder, and settle the fate of the ship at once—than to live in this pandemonium for another week. He felt that he could now understand how men, becalmed for long periods in mid-ocean, have been known to break the terrible dreariness of the expanse around them by flinging their own bodies into its depths. The mysterious horror must surely become too fearful to be endured. But had anyone ever endured such sufferings as those to which he was subjected, he wondered. Was he not a man singled out as a target for the slings and arrows of outrageous Fortune ? He felt that he was so, and he had a pleasing consciousness of being a

martyr. His reflections did not lead him to perceive that the excitement in which he was living was the very best counter-influence to the effects of the calm. But however bad everything might seem, the lurid sun still rose up high in the sky, and sent down its intolerable rays upon the dead ship and the endless monotony of waters. How much longer would this terrible time last, Charlie asked himself, as he sat down in his cabin with his head resting on his hand.

"How long, oh God, how long?"

CHAPTER VII.

CHARLIE BARTON had just spoken the words in an agony of mind. He was sitting with his head leaning on his hand, gazing vacantly at the object nearest to him upon the partition of the cabin, and it so chanced that this object was the aneroid barometer, whose index had remained unaltered, except for variations of half a tenth of an inch, during the past three weeks. It was by chance he had looked at it, and his eyes continued resting mechanically upon it for some moments; then he gave a sudden start, and was upon his feet in a second, staring at the dial with eager eyes. It seemed that he had beheld a wonderful thing in that instant,

though all he did really see was that the index of the barometer had gone back two-tenths of an inch.

This was but a small thing to observe—this change of a little piece of steel upon a small paper dial, and yet what a feeling it roused in his breast! He carefully set the movable hand of the instrument over the other, and stood watching, for half an hour, with a beating heart. It was no delusion; he could even perceive the backward motion of the index, and at the end of his period of observing, it had altered to the extent of another tenth of an inch. He knew what this meant—this sudden fall: the calm was about to be broken by a coming wind.

He went on deck and scanned the horizon in every quarter, but there was not the least appearance of cloud. The sky all round the vessel was of the same dead blue that had been its colour for long weeks.

The surface of the sea was only ruffled when a shoal of flying-fish would leap up, and skim along the placid water until they fell with sudden sharp splashes back into its depths. The sails remained flat from yard to yard, as still as though they were carved in marble. How was the change to take place? Would it be a gradual rising of clouds, bringing wind and rain with them, or would it be a sudden storm—one of the tornadoes of those latitudes?

Charlie hurried to his cabin once more, in order, by his observations of the aneroid, to be able to answer these questions. It only needed a single glance at the instrument to satisfy him. In ten minutes the hand had altered a tenth of an inch. He knew what this meant: a tornado was approaching.

Yes, in spite of the calm which was still brooding over the water, he knew that not an hour would pass before that

still, blue surface would be transformed into a surging mass, ready to bury the ship and all it contained for ever. Not a moment must be lost in getting in sail if he meant that the vessel should be saved; with the canvas that was at present spread she would not have a chance of living for a single hour. But what was he to do with the crew in such a state of insubordination?

He ran to the fore-part of the ship, calling, "Royals, my lads! All hands aloft to take in sail!"

A few of the men got to their feet instantaneously, and seemed about to carry out the order, but half a dozen who were sitting on the deck with tin pannikins of rum merely looked up and then burst into a laugh.

Once more the young man shouted his order, "All hands aloft to shorten sail!"

One of the men repeated his words with a mocking gesture, and there was a general laugh. But the man who had so openly defied Charlie's authority was in the act of drinking, when, to his astonishment, the tin measure was sent spinning across the deck by a well-aimed kick from Charlie's foot.

His decisive action was followed by a roar of laughter from the crew, all except the man who had been deprived of his drink. With an oath this man leaped up and grasped a belaying-pin ; but, with contra-oaths, the rest of the crew, who had been amused at his expense, threw themselves upon him and laid him prostrate upon the deck. A show of pluck is never without effect upon sailors, however debased. At this instant Stephens, hearing the scuffle, came up, and enquired in his usual cool manner what was the matter.

"A tornado will be down on us in half an hour, and I have ordered sail to be taken in," said Charlie.

Stephens gave a little smile as he looked aloft at the moveless sails.

"There is not a moment to lose," cried Charlie. "The barometer has gone down a quarter of an inch since morning."

"Oh, hang the barometer!" said Stephens. "It's all your fancy. There's no sign of a change."

He had hardly spoken the words when there was heard a strange rumbling sound, that seemed to come from beneath the ship herself—a sound far more mysterious than distant thunder. The men were beyond doubt startled.

"The boy's right," cried an old man. "Something's coming, and the sail had best be shortened."

Half a dozen of the men sprang up and

went to the fore-rigging ; but, before any-one had got into the shrouds, a second sound, louder than the former, was heard, and, to the terror of all, without a breath of air coming, the sea all about the ship began to surge, shaking the hull about as if it had been a cork, and making the sails flap heavily. In another moment the stern was struck by a volume of water with such violence that every man on deck was made to stagger ; the sea for perhaps half a mile around boiled and raged as though it were in a caldron, and upon the surface floated innumerable dead bodies of immense fish and strange creatures of the lowest depths of the ocean. The blue of the water was also tinged with black.

The faces of all on the deck of the ship grew white with terror. The phenomenon was mysterious to every one ; only

Charlie Barton knew that a submarine earthquake had caused the sudden convulsion in the water around them. There was an awfulness in the occurrence that made it seem almost supernatural, and as upheaval followed upheaval, and the ship shuddered and reeled through the waters that had been a few minutes before perfectly quiet, the general terror increased.

"Get aloft, if you want to be saved," Charlie shouted, springing into the fore-shrouds himself and climbing aloft. For a short time the men stood irresolute; but then, with one accord, they got to the shrouds and prepared to mount, while some, without receiving any orders, went to the halyards to loosen them. In a few minutes the royals and sky-sails had been stowed away, and the hands aloft were busy with the top-gallants, for

Charlie had determined not to let an inch of canvas be left on the vessel beyond what was absolutely necessary to give her steerage way when the storm should burst on them.

The commotion around the vessel had now ceased, but far away they could see the surface disturbed as it had been under the ship. At the same time the former calm appeared to have returned with greater intensity. But a mysterious lurid dimness was falling down upon the sea. The sun looked as if it were seen through smoked glass, and gradually it was hidden from view altogether. There was no coming-up of cloud from below the horizon, and yet above them was a dull, heavy vapour, that became gradually black as a pall, shrouding the ship. Such a darkness as succeeded had never before been felt by anyone aboard this ship. It fell

upon them all like something palpable, solid, and capable of crushing them down to the depths of the ocean.

Charlie had by this time come on deck, and was seeing that everything was secure and ready to meet the shock that was in store for the ship. He ran to look at the aneroid, and found that during the half-hour that had passed the index showed a descent of an entire inch of mercury, and the movement of the hand was quite apparent as he watched it eagerly. They would not have long to await the outburst they were expecting.

In a few minutes a rumbling sound, beginning gently, but increasing and rolling and roaring until it was a terrible crash of thunder, was heard above them. Then came a flash of lightning out of the darkness that enveloped the ship, and a peal, much louder than all the thunder

Charlie had ever heard, followed. But not a breath of wind yet. The ship shuddered and was still again.

Suddenly there appeared on the southern horizon a white mass. In a few moments this assumed the form of a snow-capped hill upon the water. A faint roar was heard apart from the roar of the thunder—a roar that increased as the white mass rolled nearer and nearer to the vessel—a roar that was the sound of mighty waters.

"Hold on, for God's sake!" Charlie shrieked, rushing over to the mainmast and binding himself to it with a dozen coils of rope.

He had a dim vision of the men crouching beneath the bulwarks and about the masts—then came a blaze of lightning—he saw towering above the ship a mighty white bank of water, and in another in-

stant he felt himself being smothered in the depths of a rolling roaring ocean.

It seemed as if the ship was quite overwhelmed by the broad mass of water that had toppled over her. The phenomenon of the immense wave was caused by the force of the tornado or rotatory hurricane acting against the influence of the submarine disturbance. It was altogether different as to its origin from the gigantic tidal waves of the west coast of South America and the West Indies, though its effect was similar.

To Charlie it was as if the ship were sailing down and down still into the secret depths of the sea. Fortunately the great wave had struck her on the bows, and had so been in a measure divided. Had the ship been broadside on, she would beyond doubt have capsized. As it was, the gigantic foremost wave had rushed down upon her, burying her for a time beneath its force,

but the very fury of its onward rush saved the ship, for she was not carried with it, on the same principle that a coin remains upon the finger when a card that has been beneath it is struck away. But though she righted herself when the first great sweep of water had passed, she was still long enough beneath the flood to cause Charlie to feel half smothered with the water, and deafened by the horrible roar.

When the ship righted herself fairly, Charlie gasped like a swimmer coming to the surface after a lengthened dive. And what a sight did he rise to! Nothing seemed to be left upon the deck of the vessel but the clinging seamen, who had crouched beneath the bulwarks while the crest of the water came down upon the deck. The deck was swept clean fore and aft. The great anchor in the bows was bent about as though it had been made

of lemonade wire, and the foremast was sprung, the fore topmast having snapt like a match with the shock alone. This was in the fore part of the ship; and aft the destruction was even more apparent, for there the deck-house, that contained the officers' cabins, was completely washed away, though Charlie had not heard anything of the crash of the timbers, so loud was the noise of the water itself. The mass of the deck-house had evidently struck the bulwarks astern, for there was a gap several yards in extent, through which the water that deluged the deck emptied itself into the sea. Fortunately, however, the wheel remained untouched in the general devastation.

This was the spectacle that came before Charlie Barton's eyes as soon as the good ship had shaken herself free from the strangling clutch of the mighty wave.

Above him the dense clouds were black, and out of their terrible darkness the chain lightning literally poured in a continuous stream ; while all around the whiteness of the seething waters made an unnatural contrast. The roar of the thunder, mingling with the hollow crashing of the water, was terrible ; but at the instant of the vessel's recovering her position, another sound more terrible was heard by the young man—the shriek of human beings—a shriek that did not come from the deck, but from the waters. He gazed out seaward, and saw on the white crest of the mountain wave that had swept over them two black helpless bodies, and then he knew that the crew of the ship was less by two men who had been carried overboard, and were lost for ever.

His first gaze was to seaward, his second to the wheel. In an instant he had rushed

astern, and was clinging to the spokes with all his energy, for he knew, unless he could keep the vessel before the hurricane, there would be no possibility of escape. It seemed that he had but drawn a single breath, when down came another deluge of water upon the deck, sweeping it from stem to stern. The wave upon the deck was more than Charlie's own depth, and he certainly would have been suffocated but for the great breach that had been made astern allowing the volume of water to escape. He had given the slack of one of the sheets several turns about his body, and then passed the bight round the centre of the wheel, so that he could not well be carried overboard; but when the second plunge of waters came, he was conscious of a mass sweeping past him; he clutched at it and saved it from being borne away, and in another instant the

black object was standing beside him at the wheel.

So far nothing could be done to prevent the ship being whirled like a cork wherever the waves tended to carry her. One moment she was buried bow downwards in the trough of the sea, and the crest of the next wave striking her would sweep her bow round until the sails were taken aback, and it looked as if the stern would be held underneath until the ship would be swamped like a boat. Unless the ship could be kept before the wind the masts would not only be shaken out of her like matches, but she would fill with water and would founder.

Charlie and the seaman beside him saw the danger at once, and so soon as there was a lull of a second, and the stern was lifted high in the air, they put the wheel hard over, so that when the rudder felt the water again the head swept round to

the wind ; the next deluge of sea ran over the stern, and was comparatively weak in its force ; and though the fore sails had been blown to handkerchiefs the first time they had been taken aback, the men at the wheel managed to run the ship before the wind. There was certainly not an inch too much canvas on her. Charlie did not believe in bare poles, and even if it had been possible to take in sail now he would not have had it shortened to the extent of a single reef—that is, so long as they could steer the ship. Running before a hurricane is like being in a carriage when the horse has run away and is going down hill ; the situation is bad enough in any case, but it is undoubtedly better if the reins are in hand, and the reins of a ship are the sails ; without canvas the helm is useless.

For two hours, then, the men toiled at the wheel, until their hands were blistered

and bleeding and their arms cramped ; but never was the ship's head allowed to swing round for more than the few moments there was no steerage on owing to the stern being thrown up on the crest of a wave. The deck was, however, constantly flooded, and Charlie could hear with dismay the plunge of the waters down to the cabin through the vacant space where the deck-house had stood. But after a time he was able to steer so as to avoid the larger seas, and yet keep the ship safe. During all the storm it did not seem that one course was kept for ten minutes. The wind appeared to come from every quarter of the compass in succession. This was puzzling to the young man, who did not know the nature of rotatory storms sufficiently well to be aware of the fact that the ship was nearly at the centre of the storm whose violence they were enduring. The wind,

of course, came from different quarters as they were forced along in its circuit, and he was not sufficiently experienced to understand how it was possible to sail quite out of the force of the tornado instead of running before it.

As suddenly as the storm had come on so suddenly did its fury abate. The torrents of rain that had fallen without cessation became less violent. The intervals between the flashes of lightning were longer, and the sky was covered over with broken clouds, instead of the thick black pall that had hidden it before. The sea, too, became more regular in its waves, and was no longer broken up into the white churning mass the ship had been sailing through. The ship was saved, but that was all that could be said. By the vigilance of the chief officer complete destruction had been avoided, though two of the

crew had been lost, and the deck-house had gone overboard.

The command to clear away wreck comes after such a storm, but it was quite unnecessary so far as the *Jessica* was concerned, for the sea had in the tidiest manner taken away all the marks of its own violence. There was not a loose rope, not a broken spar to be seen upon the decks. They had been swept as clean as the men could have made them after hours of work. The fore-topmast was all that needed to be cut away.

Charlie and the man beside him had given all their energies to the steering of the ship, and were now thoroughly exhausted. They did not think that they were guilty of any breach of discipline in allowing their places to be taken by two of the crew. The reliefs were ordered to keep the ship's head to the wind, and

Charlie went below to the cabin to see how much water had got down there. He had seen wave after wave plunge through the gap that had been made by the washing away of the deck-house, but he had no idea that he should find the cabin so flooded as it was. Everything was floating about in the greatest confusion, and, as the ship rolled heavily, the collisions between the pieces of the broken table and the wreck of the chairs were frequent, so that Charlie had to exercise his utmost skill to avoid being crushed by the remnants of the timber.

He knew that there was nothing left for him to do ; he could only wait until the water drained itself off into the hold, beneath the flooring. It would be a simple matter pumping out this water if he could get the men set to work, he saw ; so he did not feel much anxiety on this ground.

He returned to the deck, and gave orders to some of the men to go aloft and clear away the wreck of the fore-topmast, while he directed others to put the pumps in working order. The weather was every hour becoming more moderate, and there was a prospect of a spell of comparative quiet succeeding the tornado, so that they should have a chance of repairing much of the damage they had sustained.

The men went aloft without a word, and the pumps were made ready for use. Just then, from a great rift in the mighty black clouds that were piled all about the western sky, a brilliant shaft of red sunlight burst, streaming across the summits of the waves, and making the whole air lurid with its splendour. It was the sign that the storm was past; and every moment the wind grew less violent and the sea less ruffled.

The binnacle and compass had been

washed away, and also the sextants and other instruments that were in the deck-house, so that Charlie could only direct the man at the wheel to steer a general course to the south-east, from taking the bearing of the sun with respect to the vessel.

Charlie leaned over the stern and looked out to that blazing sunset, and he saw out there under the spreading light the vision of a boat floating on the waves keel uppermost. Of what value was his life to him, so lately and with such difficulty plucked from death, if that dream of his had a foundation in reality—if the boat that three days before had left the ship, had suffered the ruin from which the ship had just escaped? And if the large ship had hardly been saved, what remotest chance of safety could there have been for the frail boat?

CHAPTER VIII.

THESE reflections of Charlie Barton were cut short by the voice of Mr. Stephens behind him.

“Well, that’s so much over,” said the voice. “We had what you might call a squeak for it. I never was in such a hurricane. We’ve only lost the deck-house and two men; I don’t mind the men so much as I do the loss of all that was in my cabin and yours.”

“All the instruments are gone,” said Charlie. “We will have to steer by the small hanging compass in the cabin.”

“Hang it all!” cried the other, grinding his teeth. “It is all due to that beast of a skipper, who carried us so far north. I

wish I had let you have your own way in the navigation." Then he looked out towards the sunset, and he too seemed to have such a vision as had come before Charlie's eyes, for he laughed hoarsely, saying, "The poor devils in the boat! I wonder whether they prefer their present situation to being aboard the ship? Now, don't you feel obliged to me for having kept you here in safety?"

Charlie was too careful to give any indication of the rage that was burning in his heart at the cruel suggestion of his enemy. He controlled himself, and merely said :

"If I owe my safety to you, sir, I am sure you will acknowledge that I have returned the compliment."

"You did what was expected of you," replied Stephens. "You saved the ship from foundering, and if you bring her safe to the port of San Francisco I will take

care that you receive a recompense for your services in proportion to their value.

"Thank you, sir," said Charlie, going forward, lest he should not be able to restrain himself any longer. He knew that his ability to keep his anger in control was not without its limits.

As he went away to another part of the ship the sum of the difficulties he should have to encounter in navigating the ship came before him. Here he was, without a proper compass, without barometer, sextant, or chart, compelled to navigate a ship already in a damaged condition to a distant port. And what would be his reward? He knew well what wages he would receive so soon as San Francisco harbour was reached. And it was for this recompense that he must now work with all his might to combat the innumerable perils that lay before him!

And even though he would be so fortunate as to get free from the risks of the voyage and of his amiable shipmates, and should succeed in landing at San Francisco, what would be left for him in life? He would be compelled to go about haunted by the knowledge that it was owing to him alone that boatful of precious lives had been lost; for he could not but realise that no one in the boat had a chance of escaping if the fury of the tornado had burst upon it.

But then there came to him one consolation. Might it not be that the boat had been picked up by some northward-going ship, if it had not reached an island of shelter—one of those green coral reefs scattered throughout the wide expanse of the Southern Pacific Ocean?

The chances were small indeed, but so is the straw at which a drowning man clutches, and feels a new hope of life in his

heart; and Charlie was conscious that this chance of the safety of the precious lives in the boat was sufficiently great to cause him to strive to do his best to save the ship he was aboard of, and to suffer without murmuring all the hardships and dangers of the remainder of the voyage, even though the day of safe entrance to harbour would be the day of his death.

It was now just beginning to darken towards night. The clouds were all broken and scattered about the sky, and the moon was rising large and mellow over the waves in the east. There was in the air only a gentle breeze that filled the sails, and kept the vessel from rolling among the high waters. Truly a wonderful change from four hours previously. Charlie thought he might venture to have the hatches removed, to see how much water there was in the hold, so he gave the order to un-

batten, and he himself went below with Stephens. To his astonishment there were already three feet of water in the hold.

He could not understand how so much had got down from the cabin in so short a time, but he supposed the great volume was owing to the large open space there was left on the deck by the breaking away of the deck-house. However it had come about the fact remained the same, and so did the necessity for immediate action. He hurried above and gave directions for the pumps to be manned at once. He expected that he should have a good deal of trouble in getting the crew to obey him in setting about this duty, the most repulsive to sailors ; but, strange to say, the men fell into their places at once and worked with a will. It was certain that the young man possessed more than a little influence over them since the tornado. Then commenced

that ominous sound of gurgling water and creaking machinery which accompanies the pumping of the water out of the hold of a ship, and for hours it went on and on, until it seemed to have become a natural accompaniment to the serene moonlight that streamed along the waters and over the deck.

So soon as the first watch had been told off for the pumps, Charlie went aloft, with some others of the crew, to clear away the wreck of the fore-topmast, and also to set more sail, in order that full advantage might be taken of the breeze while it continued, that the ship might be brought out of this treacherous region of alternate dead calms and wild tornadoes. More than two hours Charlie remained aloft, for his task of directing the men, and assisting them at the same time, was by no means light. At last, however, everything was

satisfactorily arranged, the ship was carrying all ordinary sail, and the watch aloft descended to relieve the men at the pumps.

"The pumps have been two hours at work," said Stephens to Charlie, when the latter had returned to the deck. "There ought surely to be some difference noticed in the depth of the water in the well."

"I am afraid it will not have decreased anything worth speaking about," Charlie replied. "You see the water that was in the cabin will need to drain off into the hold, and that will make the depth just about the same, for all the pumping. At any rate, I will sound again."

The young man went down to the hold and found that his surmise had proved correct: there were six inches more of water in the well than when he had last sounded. He was a little surprised at the largeness

of the increase, but he made no remark. At any rate, the flood from the cabin was now all cleared into the hold, so that another hour of pumping would doubtless show a difference upon the depth of water.

Having worked for an hour by the side of the men, Charlie thought it but due to himself to snatch a short time of sleep, so giving directions that he should be aroused at a certain moment, or sooner if anything unusual were to take place, he wrapped a coarse sail about himself and lay down in the bows, and soon fell fast asleep, lulled by the monotony of the creaking and the gurgling of the pumps.

The men who were working their spell at the pumps soon slackened their efforts when they were no longer watched; but they were not so utterly callous as to stop altogether. They had insisted on getting up a gallon of rum, and every now and

again they stopped work to have a drink. Stephens appeared to have lost all power over any of them. Indeed, it would hardly have been reasonable to expect that his influence should continue longer than was absolutely necessary for the safety of the general crew, who had been promised equal shares in the spoil of the voyage. At present, however, Stephens was in no better position to offer them a division of the plunder than they were to offer him such a share. Charlie's power was due to the superiority of his intelligence and presence of mind—the most potent of all influences in hours of danger. In point of fact, Stephens did not attempt to assert any authority aboard the ship; for with his cabin in the deck-house there had been washed away his revolvers and ammunition, and without these useful assistants he felt indeed helpless among the scoundrels

he had got around him to do his work. He felt, as he stood in the moonlight watching the men drinking their rum, like the man who conjured up a demon he was afterwards unable to banish.

When Charlie awoke and had gone to see what progress the pumping had made, the men put on a spurt, and seemed to be hard at work. The young man thought this a very good sign, and he went once more down to the well, in full expectation of finding a great diminution in the depth of water indicated there. To his intense astonishment, so far from there being any decrease, there were actually four inches more of water below. Then it was that the truth dawned upon him: the vessel had sprung a leak through the shock of the tornado. The water now in the hold had not altogether come down by the space made by the wreck of the deck-

house ; it had entered through the leak in the timbers which had undergone such a strain. He hastened on deck, unwilling to give the result of his observation to the men, but still feeling that it would be impossible to suppress the truth.

"My men," he said, cheerily, "we must set-to with a will now that we have got the pumps into working order. A good deal has been done, but much remains to do. We must work altogether, and in shorter spells, until we get the water out of the hold and find out the leak !"

"The leak ?" shouted a dozen voices.
"There's no leak !"

"It's not now a question of there being one, only where is it ?" Charlie replied.
"However, we are bound to go on with the pumps, and then, when the hold is clear, we can see where is the defective plank. Now then, to work with a will !"

But there did not seem to be very much will to work aboard the ship.

"It's a hoax," said one of the men, who had been a particularly diligent worker with the rum pannikin.

"A hoax!" said Charlie. "What good would it do me to hoax you? Did I hoax you about the tornado? Do you think I care if the ship and the lot of you go to the bottom, or a good deal farther? Bah! go into the hold and see the depth of water in the well for yourselves. I've too long been the slave of the crew, and hang me if I'll be so any longer."

He turned away and quietly lit his pipe, for he really felt what he spoke.

"Curse you for fools!" cried Stephens wildly to the crew. "Do you mean to let the ship go to the bottom for the sake of a few hours' work? Are you ready to perjure yourselves for the sake of being

saved a spell at the pumps ? Didn't you all swear to be faithful to me and my orders ? "

" Look you here, my good pal Gleeson," said one of the men, in a surly, mocking way, " keep a civil tongue in your head, or we'll pretty soon give a shark the trouble of making a meal of you."

" Shut up your row ! " said another of the soberer of the men. " Give me a light there, and I'll have a look at the well myself, and report to you all about it."

He got a lantern and descended to the hold, with a couple of the others, the remaining men meantime filling out the rum in liberal measures.

" Ye brute bastes," came a voice, the identity of which was unmistakable ; " ye brute bastes, a-goin' on wid yer dhrinkin' whin the ship is rowlin' to the bottom ! Faith, I'd be sorry if she didn't go down,

for it's meself wud rejoice to say a parcel o' haythens loike ye dhrownded."

"You'll have to drown with us yourself for the sake of company, Patsy," said one of the men ; and on this view of the case being presented to the Irishman he looked puzzled and scratched his head. The others laughed and invited him to have a drink, which he most vigorously declined.

"I'm fond of a dhrink as most men," he said, "but I don't want to be dead dhrunk when I'm dhrownded."

This argument met with small favour from the crew, who roared with laughter at the Irishman's words. In a few minutes the sailor who had gone to sound the well returned to the deck.

"There's not much of a hoax in four foot two of water in the hold of a ship like this," said the man, quietly, as he neared

the idle company of pumpers. "If we want to keep afloat for another hour we had better tackle-to like men. Come on, some of you, and lend a hand."

Half-a-dozen of the men who were yet capable of human feeling, and not hardened beyond it, hastened to the side of the speaker. Charlie Barton, Stephens, and the Irish steward also came forward and took places on one side of the pump-lever without a word. The rest of the crew laughed in a half-drunken fashion, and staggered over to the rum-cask, that was now nearly empty. They filled a few pan-nikins from the bung-hole, and then sent the cask rolling along the deck, so as to upset those who were at the pump. Before it reached them, however, Charlie gave it a kick aside.

"Come, boys! we'll see how much water there is in the hold now," cried one of the

worst of the men in a jeering voice. The others laughed.

"Ay, come below, and die game!" said a second. "There's another cask of the best Jamaica rum below."

"That's the sort of thing for us," cried the others, and they all stumbled and staggered over to the hatches, down which they disappeared.

They had no sooner done so than two of the men at the pumps stopped working, and hastened away to join their comrades before the new cask should be emptied.

There were thus only seven left at the pumps.

CHAPTER IX.

CHARLIE BARTON knew that any protest or order coming from him would not be regarded in the least, so he refrained from speaking until the last of the two men had gone, and the steward had said, "Bad luck to the spalpeens!" then the young man expressed his opinion.

"Look here," he said quietly to the others, "I may as well tell you now that, from what I saw, I know that if we were to continue pumping at this rate until the morning we should still be utterly unable to clear the hold, at the rate the water is at present coming in. We cannot work for more than three hours, we all know, and all that we can do within that space is

quite a trifle. If all the crew had worked with us in spells, we could have pumped the hold clear and stopped the leak. That is impossible now."

"And why didn't you say that before?" cried the remaining four men of the crew. "Confound you! Keeping us here working the skin off our hands, while the others are at the rum below!"

In an instant, only waiting to discharge an oath at Charlie, the four ran to the hatchway and hurried down, where every now and again a roar of demoniac laughter was heard, making horrible the lovely moonlight night.

Charlie, Stephens, and Patsy stood face to face in the moonlight. They could feel the ship, already heavy with water, reel beneath them through the waves that had not yet subsided after the hurricane.

"Great God, what is left for us to do

to save ourselves?" cried Stephens, his face white with terror. "Have I planned, and plotted, and worked for this—this drowning, as if I were a dog?"

"We have one chance," said Charlie. "We can make a raft, and perhaps we shall be picked up by a ship."

"A raft for us—only for three!" cried Stephens, almost in a frenzy. "Not one of these murderers shall come with us. They are murderers to desert the pumps and the wheel. They would drown us with themselves; but we won't drown with them. They shall go down alone, the curs!"

"Come," said Charlie, interrupting him, "if you want to be saved—or to run even the slight chance we have of being saved—help me to carry the hatch covering aft. We must take whatever materials are nearest at hand."

They carried the heavy hatchway covers

aft to the breach in the bulwarks, through which the young man saw that a raft could be easily launched. Then they lashed the fore-topmast across the boards, and put two empty casks—all the rum casks were empty—underneath.

This occupied the three men nearly an hour, but they were not disturbed by the presence of any of the crew, whose drunken yells came up from the hold at intervals. Once the three on deck paused in their work, hearing the sound of a quarrel below. Accusations were exchanged with the greatest frequency, and afterwards blows, but the affair, however it originated, seemed to have been amicably settled, for only the shouts of the rioters succeeded, together with broken laughter.

But Charlie had just lashed a small cask of water to one of the spars of the raft he was making, when a much greater noise was

heard below, and a man appeared over the side of the hold, and staggered across the deck to the three who were at work there.

"I've done it," he muttered, with tipsy shrewdness and a long shaky laugh, "I've showed them what I could do. They kicked me when I wanted my share—of the rum, not the kicks. But I've done for them, bless you—eh, listen to them!—they've found it out."

Charlie looked, for the first time since he had begun to work, towards the hold. He heard the shouts of the men below, and then—what could it mean?—a cloud of smoke and a flickering glare of light were thrown upwards!

"What is the meaning of that?" cried the young man to the drunken sailor who had come on deck.

"Mean—what does it mean?" he repeated. "Don't you know so much as that?"

Oh, you're an ignorant brute. I'll tell you all about it. That means fire—fire—fire below! Now you understand all. I mean to burn out all the water from the hold—that's what I mean—to burn out the rats that wouldn't give me a taste of rum when I was dry."

The man staggered away, yelling with laughter. But Charlie rushed forward to the main-hatch and looked down. He did not need to look for long—all was plain: the flames were already making the forward part of the deck too hot to walk upon; the entire hold was lit up, and the smoke was rising in volumes.

With the courage of despair and drink combined, the men below were evidently doing their best to combat the fearful element, which seemed to have burst forth in jealousy of the prey which its natural enemy was about to secure. Charlie could

hear the hissing of the flames as bucketful after bucketful of water was thrown upon them. He could hear the curses of the men, who were trampling upon some inflammable material in the hold. He did not want to hear more, but rushed aft, to where Stephens was standing beside the raft, with an iron box at his feet—one of the iron boxes Mr. Longwood had brought aboard.

Charlie gave him a look of contempt.

"Fool and ruffian!" he cried. "Do you fancy I am going to let you make an accomplice of me in your devilish designs? Throw that overboard."

"We must have it," cried Stephens, frantically. "We cannot go into the world naked as before."

"Would you face your God with the curse of robbery and murder on your soul?" said Charlie.

"It is mine by right—all of it," cried Stephens, almost piteously. In this hour of supreme danger the man appeared no better than a coward. He had lost entirely the calm self-possession which had characterized his previous conduct in moments of the greatest difficulty, when other men would most certainly have succumbed. Now he was begging like a child to be allowed to retain the box that he fancied contained Mr. Longwood's gold.

"It is the devil's gold," said Charlie. "Overboard with it!" He made a step forward. Stephens stood over the iron box and raised his knife that had been used for cutting the lines. In another instant the two men would have been closed in a death struggle had there not been a rush aft of a dozen of the sailors, who, unnoticed, had climbed out of the hold.

They now pressed round Charlie and Stephens.

"Hollo! a raft!" shouted one, giving Charlie's work a kick.

"A raft—that's for us!" cried a few others, jumping upon it.

But another of the men spied the iron box at Stephens' feet, and gave a whoop.

"We'll not go without the gold!" shrieked a chorus. "Down to the cabin, boys, and divide it."

There was a rush of the drunken wretches, who stood with death in a double form staring them in the face, towards the cabin; and they had no sooner vanished down the broken companion than the flames burst up from the fore-hatch and roared up to the sky around the fore and main masts.

"Over with the raft!" shouted Charlie

to Patsy, for he knew that their safety depended upon the work of the next moment. The steward and he exerted their strength, and the raft was already hanging over the gap made in the bulwarks around the stern.

"Over with it!" whispered Stephens, pale as death.

Another tug and it would have been over the side, but before that motion could be completed another cry rose from the cabin. Half-a-dozen of the men leaped on deck in a frenzy of passion, and grasped Stephens by the arms and neck.

"You have gulled us—swindled us! And now you think to escape, do you?"

"You told us we should share the gold—gold—look at it," and the speaker threw out on the deck the contents of one of the iron boxes—a dozen pieces of lead. They

had discovered for the first time Mr. Longwood's secret—the boxes held lead—nothing more.

"Over with him!" shouted a few of the men that had not got a chance of laying their hands upon Stephens.

"Ay, over with him!" yelled some of the others.

They caught up the struggling, shrieking wretch as easily as they would a kitten. He was within a foot of the bulwarks when another voice cried—

"Not the sea, mates, not the sea—it's too good for him. No, *the other!*"

He pointed to where the livid mass of fire was boiling and raging upward, like a sea whose billows are flames, from the hold.

A shout of delight—the delight of demons—came from the crowd, and there were ribald jests and roars of laughter

heard above Stephens' shrieks and the wild tumult of the fire, as the man was borne along the deck to the hold. Charlie grasped the bulwarks to support himself as he saw the crowd of dusky forms in dark outline against the bright sheet of flame. They stood for a second on the edge of the abyss of fire—they swung backwards and forwards in the act of heaving something, and then the thing was heaved—a black body was thrown high in the air, and fell with outstretched arms into the seething flames beneath.

Charlie was transfixed with horror. He was unconscious of the voice of Patsy calling to him. Then he heard a heavy plunge into the water over the stern, and this roused him. The crowd of sailors, having done their dreadful work, were hurrying aft. Not a moment was to be lost. Charlie cast a glance over the stern,

and saw the raft floating at a little distance, drifting away from the ship. Patsy was upon it, shouting to him.

In another instant he had plunged into the sea, and after a few strokes he felt the strong arms of the Irishman about him, helping him upon the raft. They had at least escaped death by fire !

CHAPTER X.

“HARE ye are, me lad,” said Patsy, cutting loose one of the oars they had lashed to the raft, and putting it into Charlie’s hand ; “ take this and paddle for yer loife, an’ at the same toime be ready to give any of thim boys that may think o’ thryin’ a swim afther us a knock on the head. No follyers allowed is our motto hare.”

Charlie grasped the oar, and obeyed the other so far as paddling was concerned. They both rowed as best they might the unwieldy craft upon which they stood, and in a few moments were a hundred yards from the burning mass they had left.

What a scene it was for them to behold this night ! The spectacle was not one to be forgotten.

The moon had gone down a long time before, but the sky was studded with stars. The sea had not yet subsided, but its waves had no longer any foam upon their crests. There drifted the burning ship, from stem to stern enveloped in flame, and around the three masts were coiled mighty sheets of flame that streamed in yellow light up to the sky. The entire sea around looked like a sea of blood, only where there drifted to leeward a vast cloud of black smoke. The roar of the flames came in fitful bursts, and at intervals the crash of falling spars and the hiss of those serpents of fire that coiled round the timber as it splashed into the water.

But above the war of the elements were

borne to the two men on the raft the last cries of the living creatures huddled together at the highest part of the stern—the only spot in the ship which remained as yet untouched by the fire. Oaths—blasphemies—came from those whose forms could still be recognised in the strong light that illumined their distorted features.

Charlie could not any longer endure the terrible sight.

“Back !” he cried to Patsy. “Back ! We must save them—some of them !”

He backed with his oar with all his might. A few more strokes and the raft would be under the stern ; but, even while they looked at the burning ship, there came a roar as of thunder—a roar and a crash as spars and pieces of the deck and limbs of men were flung up into the air far above the highest spire of flame that clung about the masts. The raft was covered with

pieces of burning wood, and Charlie was struck by more than one of them. Then for the first time a groan of horror issued from him in the strange silence that succeeded, for he knew that the gunpowder stowed in the stern had exploded, and had sent into eternity every man who had remained aboard the vessel.

It was like an awfully real transformation scene, this sudden darkness and silence succeeding the flame and the roar of the fire in the ship. The sides of the hull had been blown asunder, and the decks had been made matchwood of. With one great hiss every particle of flame had gone out, leaving the sea black as ink, and sending a cloud of dense vapour and steam out to the very horizon. That was the end of the good ship *Jessica* and of her crew.

Charlie and his companion sat breath-

less, waiting and listening eagerly for any sound of life. They waited and waited for a long time, but not a single cry—not a moan—arose from any part of the water—not even the splash of a shark was heard, for the explosion had driven the very fishes far away.

"That's the last of the ship and of the crew," said the Irishman. "They did their best to murder themselves and us, but they only did the first half."

"As yet," Charlie added. "Yes, their destruction is complete. Poor fellows! if they had not been picked out by that man to accomplish his purpose they might have lived the remainder of their lives honestly, though I believe they were all at one time convicts."

"Ay, poor fellahs!" said the Irishman, half contemptuously. "They are to be pitied because they didn't manage to

get hould of the raft before I pushed off! Maybe ye think they are to be pitied because they had some little thruble throwin' the guv'nor into the hould."

"Hush, my man," said Charlie. "For that and the other crimes they have committed they were punished in the most awful manner."

"Then the account's about square now if we get off all roight," said the other, quietly. "If we don't get off though, I'm thinkin' there'll be a bit of an account ag'inst thim poor fellahs still: niver moind, we've seen the last o' thim, that's one good thing; but hare we are widout a dhrop to dhrink, barrin' a four-gallon cask o' wather, and not a boite to ate. It's not much use a steward is aboard a craft loike this!"

"We are a good many miles further south than we were when the calm was upon us," said Charlie. "We have a chance

here of being picked up by a passing vessel, though the Pacific tracks are uncertain. I can only give a guess at our position."

"Faith, I can give more than a guess at it," said the other. "Our position is on a shaky bit o' wood in the middle of an unaisy say, widout more dhrink than will kape us aloive two days. That's about the position we're in; there's no guess work about that. I thought ye were a bit asthray in yer moind when ye begun talkin' about the boat a day or two ago; but I don't think ye were so far wrong, afther all, when ye gave me yer imprission that the guv'nor was a blackguard and the rist of the crew little infarior, excipt in quality."

"It's all over now, Patsy. We had better not talk about them."

"Ay, it's a painful subjeck hare, sir; but ye say, these thrifles that come upper-

most on me moind, I can't help spakin' thim, though to be sure they are thrifles. If I had a good pound o' pork to play wid it's not minny other topics I'd want."

The two men had rowed as best they could the clumsy craft they were aboard of about half a mile from the spot where the ship had blown up, but at last the steward pulled in his oar, saying, "What's the use of wearin' a body's self out? We'll have to stand by the wreck to say if there's anything in the aytin' loine worth pickin' up, so hare goes for a slape. Some of us will nade to slape first, and as I know ye wud make me do it I won't foight ag'inst ye."

He lay down on a tarpaulin and covered himself up, putting his head upon the water-cask, and he was soon fast asleep.

Charlie wondered at the humour of the man who could talk and jest, and then quietly go to sleep, just after witnessing

such a tragedy as the burning of the vessel. Charlie himself was in no mood for sleep, though he needed it sorely. The events of the week that was past were too terribly fresh upon his mind to allow of its being sufficiently composed for sleep. Only five days had passed since he had held Miss Longwood for that instant in his arms before she had descended to the boat that had borne her away from the ship, and yet how much had taken place during that short space of time? The tornado seemed to him to have happened months ago, and it appeared a week since he had seen Stephens.

Well, all was over now. The ship that had been appropriated by the man who was not her owner, had ceased to exist. The schemer who had gathered about him a brutal band to accomplish his purposes of violence had miserably perished by the

hand of his crew. And these outcasts of society whom he had hired had all been hurled into eternity by the most horrible of deaths.

These reflections contributed to keep slumber from the eyelids of the young man.

He went on to think upon his own situation upon the raft. Had he been saved from death by burning only to be subjected to the more lingering agony of starvation? But even if it should chance that he was saved, how would he be able to find out if the boat containing all he loved best in the world—all he cared most to live for—had been picked up? How would he ever be able to discover Miss Longwood? The boat might be picked up, if it survived the shock of the tornado, by some ship, and it would, of course, be brought to whatever port that ship was bound for—a port, perhaps, in Asia; and how could he,

who might be carried to a port in America, be able to learn anything regarding her? If he should chance to be saved, he would have to begin once more a life of toil and wandering — never remaining more than a few days in any place. How, then, could he expect to ascertain tidings of that boat? By the boat he meant only the girl whom it contained, for, if the truth must be told, he did not give his most earnest thoughts to the probable fate of the boatswain, or of his friend, Phil Carter, or of Mr. Longwood.

In all his thoughts, however, there was not a single reflection upon his folly in ever having allowed himself to get into such a way of thinking about this young lady, whose natural position in the world was so much above that to which his youthful wrongheadedness had reduced him. He did not once consider the impossibility of

her ever becoming more to him than a friend.

The poor thoughtless Irishman was wiser than Charlie, for he was still sleeping, forgetting all his past cares and equally regardless of the future. If the raft were picked up the steward would be able to give a satisfactory account of himself, and he would have no trouble in finding another situation. As for the absent boat—Patsy had utterly forgotten it.

Charlie looked at his companion, envying him, as well he might, and so the hours passed in the darkness until, when it was within an hour of dawn, but still as dark as midnight, Patsy awoke and sat up on the raft, rubbing his eyes.

"Where am I, at all at all?" he muttered, and then, recovering himself, "Oh, I moind it all now; and so hare we are still. And have I slipt through a

second day and into another night? Faith, it's just loike what I'd do, so it is."

"You're not so bad as that," said Charlie, laughing, for, in spite of himself, every time he heard the Irishman's brogue the young man was cheered.

"I'm glad to hare it," said Patsy. "And now for your watch below, sir. Make a pillow of that water-cask, kapin' the bung well undher yer ear in case of accidints. I'll tuck in the tarpaulin."

Charlie lay down more to please the man than from a belief that he could go to sleep; but, like many other fond lovers, he had misjudged his own capacity. He thought that it would be quite impossible for him to close his eyes, and yet he had not been lying down for more than five minutes when he was as sound asleep as ever the Irishman had been.

"Yer in a purty way, me boy," said

Patsy, complacently, when he heard the snores of the young man. "It's a purty slape ontoirely ye're goin' to have, and bad luck to the one that awakes ye for a dozen hours at laste! Not that I expect anybody to come about hare makin' a noise. There's no need to tell Peggy to kape the childer from runnin' about overhead clatterin' wid their brogues. Och, poor Peggy, will I ever cast oyes on yer face again? Will I be lift hare to be dhrownded widout ye knowin' sorra a thing about it?—Mother o' Moses, how the lad's snorin'!—Peggy, will ye ever think of yer Patsy that doesn't return to ye? Will ye threasure up the three-legged stool ye used for to throw at me, in mim'ry of the ould toimes? Och, won't it be yerself that'll wondher what's come over me that I don't turn up? Ye'll think all sorts of bad of me, me jew'l, and

the neighbours will put things into yer head, but ye won't let anyone spake thraison of me but yerself, me jew'l. I can thrust ye there ontoirely, for it's you that knows me well. How the lad's snorin'! it makes me belave I'm back in the cabin in the ould counthry again by the side of Peggy, lookin' out on the brave pigstye at the back. Peggy, Peggy! I wish I cud go home to ye for a day, if it was just for the sake of tellin' ye how it was I couldn't return."

Thus the poor fellow went on talking to himself to while away the dreary hours of darkness and loneliness. Charlie had smiled in good-natured—almost scornful—pity at the rapidity with which Patsy had gone to sleep. "Poor beggar," he had said, "he has no care at his heart to keep him awake," and Charlie had consequently concluded how vastly superior was his own

condition of sleeplessness and heartache. If anyone had suggested the possibility of his own falling comfortably asleep, and snoring, too, so vehemently as to call up the Irishman's pleasant recollections of his native land and its live stock, he would have felt himself personally affronted; yet here he was now, sleeping so audibly as quite to do away with the necessity for a fog-horn aboard the raft, while the man whom he, Charlie, had reckoned hare-brained, sat awake by his side, speculating upon the state of mind of a certain woman called Peggy. It might be that Patsy's affection for this Peggy was quite as real as that expressed by the Poet Laureate for her namesake, whom he termed the "rare pale Margaret." Truly it is rash to judge of people's affections by their method of uttering what they feel.

CHAPTER XI.

BUT while Patsy was sitting upon the raft thinking of his cabin in the "ould country," and its occupants, including those of the outhouses, the hour of dawn was approaching. In our northern latitudes the dawn of a summer's day is felt for hours before a glance of sunlight is seen. But in the tropical sea where the raft was floating no gradual movement of nature indicated the change that was nigh. The stars about the eastern sky were suddenly quenched as a bright white light shone up from the water. The wavelets, that a few moments before had been black, were now running out to the horizon with shining

crests of silver, and all the air grew dazzling with the change—the awakening from the death of night to the life of day.

At some distance to leeward there floated just above the water a huge albatross, hardly moving his wings through a single inch of arc, and all around him flew dozens of small white and brown boatswain-birds that alighted every few minutes upon some floating material. Patsy looked towards the birds, and he saw that it was over the remains of the ship they were floating. For nearly half a mile to leeward the glowing water was overspread with charred pieces of timber and spars and casks. It soon became sufficiently light to allow Patsy to distinguish the movements of some rats, which had crowded together upon a large piece of the stern that had been blown away by the explosion before the flames had reached it.

But the birds—upon what were they alighting? upon what were they feeding?

The man knew well that it was over the maimed limbs of the wretches who had miserably perished during the night that the birds were holding carnival. Above the surface of the water now he could also mark the gleaming of the fins of the sharks. Around the scene of death there was a scene of life—screaming of birds and flapping of wings—gleaming of fins and splashing of waters. The Irishman was inclined to be of a sanguine temperament, but as he looked across the surface of the sea he could not help feeling that in a few days, perhaps, a mile or two to the windward, another revel might be held by the birds and the sharks. He knew that, without food and with only a small cask of water, neither he nor his companion could exist a week.

"The blackguards!" he muttered, glancing in the direction of the living creatures. "The blackguards! I'll chate thim if I can. Anyhow, I'll put meself on a thrainin' system, so that by the toime I'm starved to dith I'll be as thin as a knittin'-naydle. They'll be purty well sould if they come expectin' to foind much pickin' on my bones!"

Thus chuckling as if he had contrived a really good joke—as if he himself would be in a position to relish the disgust the birds would experience when they should find themselves disappointed of their expected meal off his skeleton, the volatile fellow turned away and looked across the water to another quarter of the horizon. He glanced casually to the west, and gave a start, and his glance became a gaze of the most fixed description. The sun had not yet appeared, and the west was conse-

quently the darkest quarter of the horizon ; but it was light enough for him to see at one part of the sky a small cloud of smoke.

The man looked at it wonderingly. He could not understand what it meant. " Well, this is a quare place to be sure," he muttered, scratching his head. " I dunno what that manes at all. It's sartinly the smoke of the fire of last night ; but how it comes to be there is more nor I can tell."

He gazed at the phenomenon for a good while without speaking. At last he seemed to have made up his mind as to its origin. He slapped his knee, saying, " I have it ; it's the smoke from the ship that was burnt, that was blown away by the easterly wind, and now it's bein' brought back by the wind that's changed since noight. Faith, that's just it : it's a quare thing to be sure, but isn't this just the place for quare things ?

Ay, we'll have all the smoke blown back to us afther a bit. Well, well ! "

This explanation was undoubtedly reasonable and satisfactory so far as it went. But then the phenomenon began to develop strange qualities, which in their turn required to be accounted for. In the first place, the smoke seemed condensed in its form, and it did not advance in a straggling way, but compactly, like a cylinder of smoke, broadening at its further end. This made Patsy scratch his head more diligently than before. He stood up on the raft cautiously, so as not to disturb Charlie, and looked at the smoke from this standpoint—literally standpoint—and just at that instant a gleam of sunlight, bright and flashing, passed along the water from east to west, setting all the wave-tops on fire. And in another moment the rim of the sun appeared above the horizon.

The new-risen light flashed across the waters, and showed Patsy, in the distance of the west, that the smoke had got a body beyond the density of itself—a dark, compact body—nay, he could in a few moments discern, against the background of sky which was fast becoming light, the outline of a mast.

This was more of a puzzle, and it was almost too much for the observer's senses.

"What's the manin' of this?" he muttered. "It's a quare place, this, altogether, but this is the quarest of all. The ship that we saw wid our own eyes burnin', and then goin' off loike a rocket, is comin' back by the next wind as if nothin' had happened. An' the bastes that we were a-thinkin' were blown into half-pound steaks is all aboard bearing down on us. Holy Saint Pathrick, kape us from all mischief, for that ship manes to do harm comin' in that

fashion. By the powers, the ghost of a ship that has been burnt doesn't appare for no good to bodies like us."

He lay down flat upon the raft to avoid being seen by anyone aboard the ship that appeared so ghostly to him, though had he reflected for a moment upon the quality of ghosts, whether of men or of ships, the absurdity of attempting to avoid discovery by concealment would have become apparent to him. But he lay there with his head raised only a few inches from the timber, looking fearfully along the water towards the object of terror, which, unlike ordinary ghostly visitants, chose the early morning, instead of midnight for showing itself. This eccentricity, however, only served to make it more terrible to the man. If it had even been an orthodox ghost there would not have been so much to dread; but who could say where the proceedings

of such a thing would end, when they commenced by a reckless disregard for the etiquette so rigorously observed by its family?

And while he was gazing from that uncomfortable position, which only allowed him a look at the *thing* every now and again, the sun had risen above the water, and was sending his brilliant light along the surface. Patsy had a great desire to awaken his companion to take an observation of the return of the burning ship—or, at least, of the smoking ship; but he resisted his impulse, and waited to find whether the apparition might not be out in its calculation of the exact spot in which it had evidently expected to find the raft, and to accomplish its ruin.

But no, the craft had, beyond doubt, not run by *dead-reckoning*, the most natural way to suppose a ghostly vessel to run. No, it had certainly calculated to a nicety

the position of the place where the burning had occurred, and every glance Patsy got of the advancing craft proved to him that it was bearing directly down upon the raft, and that there was a good look out aboard. He did not dare to glance at it again, nor even to raise himself an inch from the raft, but in fear and trembling he awoke Charlie.

"Hallo!" said Charlie, starting to a sitting position, and looking vacantly around him. "Where are we? Where's the ship? Oh, I remember all. How could I go to sleep?"

"Don't spake so loud, sir, and hould down yer head, if ye hope for anything," whispered Patsy.

"What do you mean?" asked the other.

"Ye'll know soon enough, sir. Ye asked where was the ship; I'll tell ye:

it's just behind ye, burnin' away as brisk as ever, and bearin' down upon us, too. Now don't turn round, sir; many a body's lost only for lookin' at a sperit—but a ship come to loife again!—och, we'll be lost ontoirely."

"The ship! are you mad?" cried Charlie.
"Where is it?"

"Och, murther aloive! We're done for if ye start up loike that—kape down, and maybe they'll pass us by."

Charlie stared at him. "What on earth are you saying? I see no ship."

"Praise the powers! it's only to me it has appared," cried Patsy. "It's not a ghost for everybody, and it's meself that's aigual to it. I know a charm or two that'll surprouse thim that's aboard."

Charlie had heard of people going mad after they had been on a raft or in an open boat for a long time; but he was surprised

at the sturdy Irishman's giving in so soon. "All right, Patsy, all right," he said, soothingly; "but if I can't see the ship, I suppose it's no harm looking for it."

He sprang to his feet before the other could utter a protest, and gazed over the water. Then it was the Irishman who had reason to fancy himself on the raft with a madman, for Charlie sent out across the deep a wild shout of delight that startled the birds, and probably the sharks. He yelled out the words:

"A steamer—a steamer bearing down upon us! We are saved, Patsy—saved!"

worst of the men in
others laughed.

"Ay, come below
a second. "There's
best Jamaica rum be-

"That's the sort
the others, and they
gered over to the ha-
disappeared.

They had no soon
the men at the pu
and hastened away
before the new cask

There were thu-
pumps.

s giving in so soon.
 "All right," he said,
 "I can't see the ship,
 but I'm looking for it."

He stepped a few
 feet before the other
 man, and gazed over the
 water as the Irishman who
 had put himself on the raft.
 Charlie went out across
 the water with a shout of delight that
 was probably the same
 words:

"A steamer heading down
 the river. That's good!"

CHAPTER XII.

“MOTHER o’ Moses, a staymer!” responded the Irishman, also starting up with such suddenness that the shaky craft nearly capsized. “It is a staymer! glory be to God, and I’ll see me Peggy once more!”

And there was undoubtedly advancing towards them a steamer whose funnel was sending to leeward the great cloud of black smoke that had caused poor Patsy, seeing it for the first time in the haze of early dawn, to mistake it for an apparition of the ship that was burnt. It was bearing straight down on them, and was already within a couple of miles of the raft.

Charlie took off his jacket and hoisted

it upon an oar, waving it wildly, and then he saw a long cloud of white steam rise from the vessel in the distance, and a few seconds afterwards he heard the peculiar sound of the fog-whistle that was blown as a signal that he was observed. He thought that, of all the musical instruments invented in the world, the fog-whistle was the most melodious. Its music to him at the present moment was heavenly. At the first faint note that reached him he fell down on his knees and burst into tears.

Patsy did not betray any emotion. He only looked earnestly towards the coming steamer, saying:

"A staymer sent to save us, and it was me tuk it for the ghost of a ship o' blackguards! Well, it's not the first toime a saint has been tuk for a sinner. Och, but it's comin' along bravely—hardly waitin' to touch the wather, it's in such a hurry. An'

what's the lad cryin' about, anyway?" he added, looking down at Charlie. "Sure, why should ye be a-cryin' now when we're all but safe? When things were at their worst ye moight have begun, but it's too late now."

Bravely indeed the steamer was cutting through the waves made brilliant by the newly-risen sun. It was a moderately-sized screw vessel, and from its maintop streamed a long pennant, showing that it was one of Her Majesty's ships in commission. This Charlie pointed out to his companion as they both sat there listening to the churning of the water by the propeller, and wondering what business a large gunboat had in these waters.

The vessel was soon near enough for them to see distinctly the small crowd around the bows, and the figure of the officer on the bridge. Closer still it came,

until it was nearing the remains of the wreck of the burnt ship; then the tinkle of the engine telegraph bell sounded, the propeller ceased its motion, and the vessel began to blow off her steam. Next came the order, "Clear away the gig!" and the "Ay, ay, sir," with the boatswain's pipe of the boat's crew. In about half a minute a boat was lowered, and half-a-dozen tars took their places at the oars, while two marines with mounted rifles got into the bow, a midshipman dropping into the stern.

"Give way."

Splash went the oars, round swung the boat, and the measured stroke of the practised man-of-war's men put weigh on until the intervening distance was passed. Charlie had often heard of the tedious forms to be gone through in the navy; but surely the absurdity of putting two marines, with rifles

and bayonets, into the bow of a boat in the act to rescue a couple of men on a raft in the middle of the Pacific, was beyond anything that had been reported.

A greater surprise was, however, in store for him, for when within a dozen yards of the raft, at an order from the midshipman, the men stopped rowing.

"Marines, attention!" shouted the midshipman, and the two soldiers stood up. Then he turned to the raft. "Raft, ahoy! Are you off the ship that was burning last night?"

"We are, sir," answered Charlie.

"What was her name?"

"*Jessica*, sir."

"Good," said the midshipman. "Now, look here, my men, we are off the *Cockroach* gunboat, of the Australian station, and you are our prisoners. If you refuse to come aboard, or offer any resistance, we

have orders to shoot you down. Back water, all!"

Charlie was struck dumb with amazement.

"We are not likely to refuse to go aboard your vessel, sir," he said. "Nor is it probable we will show fight, but I don't understand why we should be taken prisoners."

"If a man of ye lays a hand on a fray Irishman, ye'll foind, me lads, that there's some foight lift in him," said Patsy. "If ye think it was us set foire to the ship, you'er purty far out, me lad. It was thim blackguards aboard."

"You will have an opportunity of explaining all, in a few minutes," said the officer; and the boat having been backed alongside the raft, Charlie and his companion got into the bows, between the armed marines.

"Give way, men," said the midshipman,

and the sailors began to row once more back to the gunboat. In a few minutes the boat was under the companion ladder.

"Marines, take your prisoners aboard," said the midshipman, who seemed never tired of giving his orders. Charlie and Patsy hardly required much taking aboard. They got upon the ladder and ran up, the marines following.

On the deck stood the commander, in gold-laced cap and gilt buttons. Charlie touched his own tattered cap, and the marine beside him shouldered his rifle. There they stood like statues until the midshipman came up, giving about a dozen orders to the boat's crew in the meantime. He advanced and touched his cap to the commander, and made his report. "Prisoners offered no resistance, sir," he said.

"How the mischief cud we?" remarked the Irishman, apologetically.

" Silence, sir," said the commander. He then turned to Charlie.

" Your ship was burnt. What was her name ? "

" *Jessica*, sir, of Hull."

" Her master ? "

" Butcher, sir ; he died on the voyage."

" What was the voyage ? "

This question was rather puzzling to Charlie.

" Well, sir, I shipped at Melbourne for a run to England ; but the course was changed at sea. I was chief officer."

" What was the owner's name ? "

" I heard it was Stephens, sir ; but I had shipped under a false owner : it was a trap, that would need to be explained to you, sir."

" Had you any passengers ? "

" Yes, two," Charlie faltered.

" Were they lost in the burning ? "

"They were not there, thank God!" cried the young man fervently. "They were saved that, at any rate."

"How so?"

"They had left the vessel in an open boat five days before."

"Are there any other survivors of the fire?"

"Not one, sir."

"Thank goodness," remarked the Irishman.

The commander smiled.

"Quartermaster?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Send the man you will find in the carpenter's cabin forward to us."

"Ay, ay, sir."

The quartermaster departed, and there was a dead silence. Then came the sound of footsteps on deck. Charlie looked round, and gave a cry of wonder and delight, for the

man who was advancing with the quartermaster was none other than Phil Carter.

In spite of the consciousness that he was a prisoner, and the knowledge that the etiquette aboard a man-of-war required the constant preservation of a calm exterior, Charlie rushed forward and grasped the hand of his friend.

"Charlie, old boy!"

"Phil, old fellow!"

These were the only words that were faltered between the two for some moments, and then the question that had been the first to flash across Charlie's mind on seeing Phil came to his lips.

"Is *she* safe, Phil?" he managed to whisper.

"She is safe, aboard this boat," Phil answered, with a sly smile.

"Thank God—thank God!" said Charlie fervently. What a change had come to him

since daybreak! He had gone to sleep without a hope of anything but a speedy death, and, as if in an instant, this great and unexpected happiness had come to him. Truly his sorrow had endured but for a night, for joy had come to him upon the wings of the morning.

"And how did you come here?" he asked; but suddenly recollecting the awful presence of the commander of the gunboat, and the neighbourhood of the midshipman, who seemed ready to give half-a-dozen fresh orders, Charlie stopped speaking to Phil.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said to the commander, "but I can't help myself—all is so strange—so like a dream."

The officer smiled.

"The explanation you have given of yourself is satisfactory," said he. "You are no longer a formal prisoner, and all that

remains for me to do is to offer you my congratulations upon your safety, and my commendation for the great skill and courage I hear you displayed in securing the safety of the passengers on board your vessel, under such exceptionally difficult circumstances."

He offered his hand to Charlie, who could not make any reply, he was so much overcome with this sudden descent from ceremony to kindness on the part of so great a personage.

"Dismiss the guard, Mr. Hornby," said the commander to the midshipman.

"Yes, sir," answered that satellite, touching his cap, apparently glad to be able to resume his occupation of giving orders. "Guard, attention! Stand at ease! Unfix bayonets! Shoulder arms! Right turn! Dismiss!" These were a few of the words that were to Charlie as the turning of the

bolts of the prison that barred him from liberty.

"Now you are free," remarked the midshipman, officially.

"Hurrah for ould Ireland! we're fray," shouted Patsy, executing a short but expressive dance upon the deck.

Then another step was heard, and who should come up but the boatswain of the *Jessica*.

"Faith, we'll soon have the whole ship's company about us," remarked Patsy. "Oh, the thafe o' the world! Luk how he's ashamed to hould up his head, afther takin' the boat away under yer very nose."

The boatswain did feel a little awkward, remembering how he had rowed away from the *Jessica* so soon as Charlie had been knocked down by Stephens. But Charlie's hearty greeting now set him at his ease, for the young man recollected that he had

heard Miss Longwood's passionate cries of entreaty to return to the vessel, and he could hardly find fault with any proceeding that had brought out such an expression of her feeling.

"I trusted to you to get yourself clear," said the boatswain; "and I knew that if we returned it would be a matter of death to us all."

"And you were quite right," said Charlie. "You did what was right and just. But how and when were you picked up? Tell me all your log from the morning you left us."

"Be the powers, if yer goin' to begin that way, I'll just see what I can pick up in the aitin' and dhrinkin' way for meself," said Patsy. "Ah, hare's the gentleman that'll give orthers for our brikfist," he added, as the midshipman came up.

"Quartermaster!"

"Yes, sir."

"Conduct the officer of the rescued crew to the warrant officers' mess, and the other to the steward's pantry."

"Ay, ay, sir."

They were just moving away when a tall, brown-faced man came up.

"Where is the mate of the *Jessica*?" he asked, glancing around, and singling out Charlie in a moment. "You were the mate?" he asked, and Charlie bowed. "And our surmise is true, then: it was the *Jessica* that we saw on fire last night?"

"The ship was set fire to a couple of hours after sundown," Charlie replied.

"Come and tell me the whole story," said the gentleman. "My name is William Stephens, I was the owner of the *Jessica*, whom, I understand, that scoundrel who engaged you personated. I hope he didn't escape."

The recollection of the horrible end of the man who had called himself Stephens came vividly back to Charlie; with a shudder, he turned away.

"He got all he desarved, yer honer," remarked the Irishman. "But if we don't be obeyin' the purty young gintleman's orthers about brikfist, he'll be makin' us pris'ners ag'in."

"Come along," said Phil Carter. "You must have breakfast and a sleep, and then we will exchange stories."

"It's not much slape he nades," said Patsy. "He slipt loike a top, and he snored till I fancied I was back in the ould counthry."

"How would his snoring make you do that, I'd like to know?" asked Phil.

"Ye haythen, have ye nivir slipt in the next room to a fine sow in good condishin, but widout a handkerchie?"

There was a general laugh as Charlie, Phil, and the real Mr. Stephens went to the warrant officers' cabin, Patsy going aft with the boatswain and quartermaster.

CHAPTER XIII.

By the time Charlie had finished breakfast, he had told all the story of the events that had led to the burning of the *Jessica*, and had received in return the history of the picking up of the boat, which had, with its precious freight, left the ship upon its adventurous voyage.

It appeared from the details that, a few hours after the *Jessica* had set sail from Melbourne, the real owner arrived in that city, and was, of course, greatly amazed to learn that another person alleging himself to be William Stephens had been with the agents, and had already sailed in the vessel. The real Mr. Stephens had at once com-

municated with the authorities, and the result was the despatch of the police steamboat, to arrest the ship before she was out of the bay. How the police boat was disabled has already been recorded. Upon its return to the port an application was made to the government for a gunboat to pursue the vessel that had escaped in such a manner, after outraging all authority, and a gunboat was immediately granted, but being on a cruise round the coast, it was three days before the *Cockroach* could be despatched, under steam and sail, with orders to find the ship, take the crew prisoners, and bring her back to Melbourne.

But the tracking of a ship through the Southern Pacific ocean is obviously a more difficult task than that of tracing the "spoor" of an elephant in the wilds of an African jungle. All that the gunboat could do was to take for granted that the

Jessica would pursue the usual course to England, and follow her upon that probable line.

This the gunboat had done ; and if the *Jessica* had continued upon her original track she would undoubtedly have been captured, but, as is already known to those who have read this narrative, the *Jessica's* captain had sailed considerably to the north of the usual track of ships, and the ship having been becalmed in that region, the gunboat had actually passed her longitude, and was making a circuit in the hope of falling in with her.

Disheartened by his want of success, and his supply of coals running short, the commander of the *Cockroach* had given orders to return to Melbourne. But just then the watchful officers had observed the signs of an approaching tornado. The commander, being thoroughly acquainted with the laws

of storms, knew well by what means he could avoid imperilling his vessel, by keeping clear of the circle of the fury of the rotatory storm; so after consulting his barometer and sympiesometer every five minutes, in order to find out the probable centre of the tornado, he had put his vessel upon a course that was at a tangent from the circular sweep of the wind. It was the fact of the vessel being thus put out of her direct way that had caused the *Jessica's* boat to be discovered and rescued, for the *Cockroach* had not proceeded more than a dozen miles upon her path of escape from the threatened danger when the boat was seen and picked up, after having been four days at sea.

From the people in the boat the entire history of the voyage had been learned, and Phil Carter being able to point out on a chart the position in the region of calm where the *Jessica* had been left, the gun-

boat had ventured as close as possible to the limits of the tornado, whose effects could be seen in the distance. After steaming some hours, the look-out had reported a light on the northern horizon. Orders were then given to steer for this light, and a little after midnight the last flames of the ship became visible. As the position of the light corresponded to the situation Phil Carter had assigned on the chart to the *Jessica*, making due allowance for the change the tornado would have caused, there was but little doubt in the minds of the officers that the burning ship was the one they were in pursuit of. It was, as has been told, early dawn before the *Cockroach* had reached the raft with the only two survivors of the catastrophe, and the commander had, naturally enough, ordered them to be taken prisoners, as he knew, from the information he had received from the occupants of the

boat, that the chances of the survivors being prison-worthy were very great.

This was in brief the narrative Charlie Barton heard in exchange for the story he had to communicate.

Meanwhile Patsy had spun his yarn to all the people in the steward's pantry while he made one of the heartiest breakfasts that had ever been devoured aboard Her Majesty's gunboat *Cockroach*. He had neither finished his yarn nor his breakfast when a message was brought to him that the young lady who had been rescued in the *Jessica's* boat wished him to come to her cabin as soon as possible.

"Then, me lads, I must go at once, and come back for the rist of the brickfist and tell ye the rist of the sthory," he said, apologetically, to the party of which he was the centre. "That swate craytchure mustn't be kept waitin'. It's moighty .

swate she is upon mesilf, that same young woman, so I'll nade to toidy mesilf a bit."

With many winks and nods, he went off, while everybody laughed.

Miss Longwood was sitting in the cabin that had been allotted to her father by the commander. Mr. Longwood had suffered so much from the extreme exposure to which he was subjected in the open boat that he had been confined to his berth ever since he had come aboard, and was under the doctor's care.

The young lady started from her seat on the entrance of Patsy, and grasped his hands heartily with both of hers. Her father could not speak for emotion; he could only shake the steward's rough fist earnestly; and poor Patsy, unaccustomed to so much condescension, felt overcome.

The story which he told, in answer to Miss Longwood's inquiries, was not nearly

so interesting as that with which he had regaled the pantry boys ; it was not quite so lurid in its details, nor was he himself the sole hero, as he had made out to the others. But Miss Longwood heard how Charlie Barton had suffered for her sake, and how, on his recovering consciousness, his first inquiry had been for her. The Irishman had long since seen how things stood between Charlie and this young lady, and he intended that the few points he might touch upon regarding Charlie's courage and sufferings should be very much to the point indeed.

"He is a brave fellow truly," said Mr. Longwood. "Is he not, my dear?"

"I always knew that he was, papa. But why does he not come to us—to you, I mean—now? He surely knows how anxious we—that is, you—would be to see him and hear his story."

"My dear, Mr. Brown's story would undoubtedly be exactly the same as our good friend Patsy's."

"Of course," said the young lady, somewhat pettishly. "Still, I think he might have come at once to see us, papa."

"Ah, Miss," said the Irishman, "it's not much ye know yet about this ship. Nothin' can be done here widout orthers. There's a bit of a lad wid a gold band on his cap that bates all I ever come across for givin' orthers. He's a swate boy; but I doubt if Mr. Brown was to lave the cabin he was sint to widout orthers the boy would have him hung up to the yardarm."

"What disgraceful tyranny! Is it not, papa?" cried the young lady, indignantly. "I'll go immediately to the captain and tell him——"

"My dear, don't make a fool of yourself," said Mr. Longwood, interrupting her.

"I'll write a line to the captain to send Mr. Brown here, and I am sure he will oblige me by letting him come. Give me a piece of paper."

In an instant the obedient girl had done her father's bidding, and upon the paper these words were written:—

"Mr. Longwood presents his compliments to Captain Carpenter, and would thank him to permit Mr. Brown, late the chief officer of the 'Jessica,' to come for a short time to Mr. Longwood's cabin."

This missive was given to Patsy to deliver to the commander, and, so soon as he had left the cabin, Miss Longwood rose.

"I suppose I may go now, papa?"

"Go? Why do you wish to go when you know Mr. Brown will be here in a few minutes?"

"But he is coming to see you, papa," replied the girl, meekly.

"Nonsense, my dear ! You know it was you who made me send for him. You were going to Captain Carpenter about it yourself."

"Oh, papa ! how can you talk in that way ? You know it was only on your account I wanted Mr. Brown to come here. I thought you would like to speak to him."

"Now, Winny, I must ask you not to talk any more nonsense. You were the first to wonder why Mr. Brown did not come to us. You even went the length of calling him unkind. You should be as glad as myself to see him."

"I do feel glad—oh, so happy!—that is, glad that he is safe ; and, if you insist upon it, I shall remain here, papa. I don't suppose he will think it strange."

"I must confess I believe he would have reason to consider it very ungrateful if you did not meet him here and speak to him

now. Remember all that he has done for you."

This effectually silenced the young lady. To say the truth, she did remember all that the young man had done for her. She remembered all very clearly. In fact, her father would have been surprised could he have known how distinctly every act of this young man's was photographed upon his daughter's memory.

It seemed that the short note written by Mr. Longwood had the effect of softening the reputed inexorable heart of Captain Carpenter, for in a very few minutes Charlie Barton knocked at the door of Mr. Longwood's cabin. At the sound Miss Longwood started up, and when the young man entered she was standing with her face pale, both hands pressed to her heart as if to soothe its beating. Truly her heart was now a little unruly. In another instant

Charlie was holding one of her small hands in his own big paw, that could have smothered in its grasp both of her little hands, and he was looking into her eyes earnestly, as if he sought to read within their liquid depths a response to the speech of his own.

"We are so—so glad to see you!" she murmured, and the young man saw her eyes become suffused with tears before she had turned aside her head. He could not utter a single word himself. His heart was too full; for was she not given back to him, as if from the dead?

Then came the voice of Mr. Longwood, speaking in cordial tones as he shook Charlie by the hand.

"And so you escaped from those ruffians, my lad," he said. "Thank God you escaped! The thought that you, who had done so much for us, should be left to

their mercy, was our greatest trouble. But all was ordered by Providence for the best."

"Yes, sir," said Charlie. "If a person had never been devout before, one would become so in passing through such a week as we have passed. When I heard from our old boatswain that it was by the tornado's coming on the boat was picked up, and that it was through the ship being on fire that it was seen, I felt that indeed there was a Providence guiding all things."

"It was decreed by Providence that you should be aboard that vessel to save us from the destruction that would most certainly have overtaken us, but for you," said Mr. Longwood. "And it was the same Power that brought such sudden destruction upon those wretches who had been in that plot against us."

"They came to a fearful end, sir; no

one who had not seen them maddened as they were with rum could guess how fearful."

Charlie remained in the cabin with Mr. Longwood and his daughter for a couple of hours, exchanging experiences of all that had passed since they had met together. It was quite six days from the morning they had parted so abruptly on the deck of the *Jessica*. Six days—while it seemed as many years; for the true measure of time in the mind is not by days and hours, but by events; and surely the events of more than six years had been crowded into the space that had elapsed between their parting and meeting again.

When Charlie Barton quitted the cabin he was forced to admit that, even at its best, his life aboard the good ship *Jessica* had never equalled in happiness these two hours spent with the Longwoods.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE remainder of whatever story may have arisen out of the incidents of a few weeks in the lives of these people is very easily told.

The gunboat *Cockroach* proceeded under steam and sail on the voyage back to Melbourne; but in her ward-room the same content that had characterized all the vessel's previous voyages did not seem to be reigning any longer. The truth must be told: the ward-room was turned upside down. The second lieutenant made no secret of the impression he had formed as to the doctor's being a conceited puppy, and the doctor expressed to a mutual friend his opinion that a greater ass than the second lieutenant was not engaged in the

service of his country—a rather bold assertion, it must be admitted. Then the senior midshipman declared at his mess that the doctor was an insufferable prig, and the second lieutenant a bully—simply a bully. And this being so, it would scarcely be possible to deny that affairs in the ward-room were in anything but a satisfactory condition.

To find out the origin of these disagreements would not have been a difficult task. The second lieutenant had conceived a fervent hatred for the doctor, solely because the doctor had been sitting by the side of Miss Longwood, under the awning of the quarter-deck, during the greater part of the second lieutenant's watch on deck; and the doctor had acquired a sovereign contempt for the second lieutenant because he had observed that active and intelligent officer rigging up a sea-grass hammock for the

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same young lady. As for the midshipman, he bitterly despised both the others because they took advantage of their senior position to make themselves agreeable to Miss Longwood, and invariably interrupted his conversations with her. All the while, the cause of this sundering of friendships was in total ignorance of the havoc her presence was creating. She chatted with each of the officers when they insisted on chatting with her, and she got especially friendly with the commander, which was very disgusting to the others, who knew that he was a married man.

Charlie Barton messed with the warrant officers, and made friends with them all. He was not slow to observe the way the lieutenant and the doctor forced their attentions upon Miss Longwood; nor could he shut his eyes to the fact that the extra number of orders given by the senior mid-

shipman was due to the emotions of that young gentleman's heart. Charlie grew very melancholy.

"What a fool I am to think that I could have any chance by the side of these navy swells!" he muttered, as he leaned over the bulwarks and heard the laughter of the doctor, as he tried to make himself agreeable to Miss Longwood on the quarter-deck. He saw her respond to the doctor's merriment, and he turned away his head and looked into the water once more.

He was indeed very despondent. What a fool he had been to fancy that such a fellow as he could dare to hope to have his love returned by a lady who was accustomed to cultivated society! He was, after all, nothing more than a sailor; and though he could never dream of accusing Miss Longwood of ingratitude, yet he began to suspect that her gratitude was of that sort

which induces one to give a poor man half-a-crown for stopping a runaway horse. That was all.

Then what folly it would be for him to cherish this love, that had grown to be a part of his life, since he was now an out-cast, without a penny in his pocket ! She had a large fortune, no doubt ; but could he bring himself down from his position, as an independent but penniless man, to be a fortune hunter ? No ; if he could even be certain that she loved him he could never condescend to live upon her money. He would trample down all his thoughts of her—that was the only thing left for him to do.

He had no sooner come to this sensible resolution than he heard Miss Longwood's voice behind him.

"How is it we do not meet every day, as we did aboard the *Jessica*, Mr. Brown ?" she asked. "When you see me on deck

you try to avoid me. Have I done anything to offend you?"

He started and looked at her. "You do anything to offend me!" he repeated. "Pray do not talk in that way, Miss Longwood."

"And if you don't want me to talk in this way why should you treat me so badly? Aboard the *Jessica* you showed some consideration for me; but here you are changed. What is the reason of this?"

"Oh, it's different here," he replied, slowly. "Aboard the *Jessica* there was no one to speak to, but here it is quite the contrary."

"Upon my word, you are flattering, Mr. Brown. You imply that you only spoke to me aboard the *Jessica* because you had no other respectable person to associate with, and that now you cut me because you have."

"You know I meant that *you* were so situated, Miss Longwood. Here you are surrounded by gentlemen such as you are accustomed to meet. I am not so conceited as to imagine you would mind my not speaking to you, when you have so many better companions."

The girl looked reproachfully into his face.

"I never was spoken to so unkindly and unjustly in all my life," she said. "I never expected to be accused by you of ingratitude—and such ingratitude."

She turned aside, and was walking away when he interposed and faced her once more.

"Pray forgive me, Miss Longwood," he said, earnestly. "I did not mean to accuse you of anything. I look on you, God knows, as incapable of any action that is not true and generous; but I do

not want to be a fool. I desire to remember that I am in a different position from that you occupy. I am only a sailor, and I have no prospects."

"We were once in the same position, as to danger," she said. "Doesn't danger make all people on a level? You will not force me to wish we were back in that danger once again."

What could her meaning be, he thought. Was it possible that she was longing to be on a level with him? He gave a hasty glance around. It was evening, and they were standing amidships. No one was nearer than the wheel. There was a little pause, and the girl appeared again in the act of moving away when again he stood before her.

"Miss Longwood, there is something else besides danger that levels all—you know what it is. Should I be a fool to

hope that one day we might be on a level through love?"

He was speaking in an eager whisper. He saw her beautiful face become pale, and he could not fail to notice how her lips were trembling. Then she glanced up to his face, and put out her hand as she said:

"You have never been a fool. We are already equal, if you are as true as I think you."

"Great heavens, what have I done that I should deserve this from her lips?" he whispered, as if to himself. "Oh, my darling, I am true—true as steel—true to death for you."

"I believe you with all my soul," she said, and in another instant he would have held her in his arms had not the doctor shown himself at the door of the gun-room.

"Now, my dear Miss Longwood, you must not stand in the draught that there is always here," he said, authoritatively,

paying no attention to Charlie. "Come astern, I beg of you."

"Good evening, Mr. Brown," she said, with a little smile. "We shall see you to-morrow I hope, when there will be no draught."

Charlie bowed, taking off his cap, and inwardly extinguishing the doctor, whose senseless witticisms he could hear from where he stood.

"Roar away, you idiot!" he muttered. "Laugh until you are hoarse now; I don't mind it. I have conquered—she is mine!"

He went back once more to the ship's side, and looked again into the glowing waters. The waters were surely much brighter than when he had seen them five minutes before. They seemed laughing—nay, winking jocosely at him as they rippled against the sides of the vessel. Everything was infinitely brighter and

more beautiful than anything had ever been. It was as if the short twilight were broadening once more into day instead of dwindling into night. He had never known before how wonderfully glorious the sea was, and all this was because he had heard the voice of a girl uttering such blessed words in the stillness of the evening air. Each word was as a brilliant meteor, making the world bright around him.

He stood at the side of the vessel that, in glorious independence of the direction of the wind, was making her way through the ocean, until the night had come. He heard the ship's bells rung every hour, and he distinguished the senior midshipman's voice giving orders as to the registry of the log. Above his head, on the bridge, the steps of the officer on watch sounded, and now and again he caught the voices of the idlers in the stern chatting ; but he gave no

attention to any of the sounds, so rapt was he in his own sweet thoughts.

After a couple of hours had passed, his thoughts began to assume a more subdued form. He began to recall his former convictions. Had he not just arrived at a determination that it would not be for his own or for Miss Longwood's happiness that he should continue to hold her image in his heart? Yes, he had formed this resolution a few minutes before she had spoken to him. He had made up his mind that it would be a mean thing for him to do to ask a girl with a large fortune to love him, who had not a single penny, and who was in a comparatively subordinate position in life. And yet had he not immediately afterwards broken all his resolutions?

These reflections were by no means agreeable to him, because they brought him back

to a sense of what he had felt to be his duty, which could not have changed within the last hour. Yes, in spite of all Winifred Longwood had said to the contrary, he was undoubtedly a fool—a weak fool. He knew that the rule he had laid down had been proper and wise, and yet he had broken it only through hearing a few gentle, girlish words. Yes, he had shown great weakness.

The more he considered the matter in a calm and collected frame of mind—or, at least, as calm and collected as it was possible for him to have—the more convinced did he become that he had acted contrary to reason and justice. He had made himself a greater fool by telling this girl that he loved her when he had no position to offer her, and when he had fully decided not to be dependent upon her for his very bread. He felt—well not

exactly miserable — only hopeless. He walked up and down the deck for a long time, until the order to put out lights was given, and he was obliged to turn into his bunk in the dark. And even here he could not rest, but tossed about for hours. The only thing that gave him sleep at last was another resolution that he made, and that he would keep, he swore. This soporific was that he would write a note to Miss Longwood—he could not trust himself to see her face to face again—in which he would tell her that he found he had been weak in speaking to her on a subject which he had meant to have been proscribed. He would beg of her to forget that he had ever said a word to her of love. This resolution he took, and so fell asleep.

He awoke in the morning with the weight of his determination upon his mind. It seemed to get hardened into his mind

during the night, until it appeared to him a duty from which there was no escape. So after breakfast he borrowed some sheets of paper, and sat down to his task of composing the difficult letter. It was certainly a heavy task for him to express his exact meaning in words without being either sentimental or commonplace. He found that it was as well he had been supplied with a quire of note paper instead of a single sheet, for page after page he tore up until he had as many scraps of paper as would have made a snowstorm on the stage of a theatre. It was not until he had toiled for a couple of hours that he finished a letter he thought would express his meaning, though it certainly was not so satisfactory as he could have wished.

It was, on the whole, a manly and honest letter. It told Winifred Longwood that he felt he had acted foolishly in talking to her

as he had done. It begged her to forget that he had said a single word to her on the subject of which they had spoken, and it assured her that he would hold as sacred everything she had in the goodness of her heart said to him. This was about all there was in the letter which occupied him so long in writing.

He wiped his forehead when it was finished, and laid the note aside in an envelope, to await an opportunity of sending it to its destination. His mind being so far relieved, he went out upon the deck and resumed his old occupation of gazing over the side of the vessel into the deep blue sea. In spite of his having done what he regarded as his duty, the water was a good deal darker in the morning sunlight than it had been in the evening twilight. A cloud was hanging over all things.

He had not been standing here for very long when he heard a step behind him, and, on looking round, he saw Mr. Stephens coming up. He had long since become an especial friend of this gentleman's, for Charlie had found no great difficulty in overcoming his natural shrinking from the name of Stephens.

"Hallo!" said the gentleman, "I should have thought you had got enough of the sea without gazing into it so pertinaciously as you have been doing lately. You're getting moody through having nothing to do or to think about aboard the gunboat. Why don't you borrow something to read? Get the Captain to lend you Norie or Raper, and study navigation; or here are half-a-dozen Australian papers of the date of our departure, you will find something new to you in them. You have not heard much of what is going on in

Melbourne for the past month, I'm sure, so you can't call anything stale."

Charlie thanked the speaker, and accepted the bundle of newspapers he offered. They then chatted together for some time until Mr. Stephens went down to tiffin, and Phil Carter came up and sat by Charlie's side, begging the loan of an *Argus*. In a few minutes both of the young men were deep in the news of the colony—such as it was.

A newspaper of any date is a welcome companion aboard a ship that has been many days at sea. Every line is eagerly scanned, and matters that on shore would be deemed unworthy of a moment's attention now become topics of the most enthralling interest. Charlie got through the leading articles, which discussed the policy of the House of Assembly in the matter of the extension of the borough

franchise, a question that it must be confessed he had woefully neglected hitherto. However, the newspaper had plenty to say about it, and he read every line. Then there were the statistics of the mines, and an exhaustive account of the laying of the foundation stone of an insurance company's office, and Charlie read every speech. Afterwards he got to the births, marriages, and deaths, and he found this list quite entertaining, especially as he did not know even one of the persons concerned in the list. Finally he found himself in the midst of the advertisements, and these were exceptionally enthralling.

He was informed by Messrs. Shearer and Lappet that their extensive tailoring establishment was immensely enlarged, and they begged the favour of an early trial. He made a resolution that he

would grant their request. Then Mr. John Mugg, the delf man, called Charlie's attention to the cheapness of his new china teapots, the second million of which had just been manufactured, and awaited nothing but customers. Charlie made up his mind there and then that, as soon as he landed, the advertisement would have to be reduced to 1,999,999. Next he read of the alarming sacrifice of bootlaces that was being made at a Mr. Legge's establishment, and of course his face grew pale at this intelligence. Lastly, he came to the column in small print containing legal notices. He read that a sheriff's sale would take place on a certain haberdasher's premises, and of a dozen strayed sheep that would be sold to defray the expenses of keeping them. Then of a certain gentleman who had taken a hasty departure from the

city, forgetting to pay his debts. At last he read a little further on that —— the paper dropped from his hand, he gave a cry that caused Phil Carter to jump up.

"Hallo, what's the row? by George, your face is like death," cried Phil. But Charlie gave him no answer. "Now then, Charlie, old fellow, tell me what is the matter?" Phil continued, eagerly. Charlie passed his hand across his eyes, as one does mechanically in recovering from the effects of a great surprise. He made a vain attempt to pick up the paper, and Phil in an instant put it into his hand.

"Is it something in the paper that has startled you?" he asked, as Charlie tried with trembling fingers to point out a paragraph in the advertisement sheet. "What, 'Two thousand Turkish towels!' that's not it, surely; 'Black mare, with

one eye, gone astray ;' ' Socks for the million.' Hallo !—your name—by Jove, that's rum !" He read the advertisement Charlie managed to point out to him. It was as follows :—

"HEIR-AT-LAW WANTED.—FIFTY POUNDS REWARD. — WANTED, Information regarding the whereabouts of CHARLES BARTON, aged twenty-four, heir-at-law to the estate of the late Charles Compton Barton, of Dorchester, solicitor, who died intestate. The above reward will be paid by the trustees of the estate of the late Charles Compton Barton to anyone communicating such information as will lead to the discovery of the said Charles Barton, who left his home eight years ago, and when last heard of was mate on a vessel trading between Australia, New Zealand, and England. The sum of twenty-five pounds will be

paid to anyone communicating satisfactory proofs of the death of the said Charles Barton. Application to be made to the undersigned,

"JAMES MULLAN,

"THEOPHILUS GRIMSHAW,

"Both of Dorminster."

By the time Phil Carter had read this advertisement, Charlie had recovered himself.

"By George, Charlie, you're in luck," cried Phil. "Heir to an estate! Hang me if I don't send forward a claim for the reward. You never told me your governor was dead."

"I never knew it until now," said Charlie. "My poor old father! I treated him badly, Phil; God forgive me. Yes, I know now I treated him shamefully. He only did what he thought right towards

me. He was right, too ; I should have stayed at home."

"He has left you his property at any rate," remarked Phil, who could not find anything else to say.

"How could he have died without making a will?" said Charlie, musing. "He gave me to understand that I should not receive a single penny of his money, and I certainly never expected anything."

"You will say farewell to the sea now, I suppose," said Phil. "I daresay the property is considerable."

"I know my father was thought wealthy in Dorminster," replied Charlie, "but how wealthy I cannot tell. I almost wish he had left his property away from me. I should have been cut up, any how, coming upon the intimation of my poor father's death so unexpectedly, and knowing that we parted in anger, while in all these eight

long years I have never sought for a reconciliation. But to be called on to profit by the hard won earnings of the old man, whom I forsook without any reason, and to whose lonely age I was no stay, only forces upon me a stronger sense of how ill I behaved—what an undutiful, unfeeling son I have been."

"Oh, come now," said Phil, "don't let yourself be cut up like that. But, by George, it does appear so rum your being picked up from the raft, and then having this paper given to you by the merest chance. Any where else you would not have thought of reading the advertisements. I say, it is jolly rum how everything has hung together to bring out this for your special benefit. Why, you'll be buying a few dozen ships for yourself, Charlie, old man; you won't have to sign many more agreements."

Charlie said no more about his keen self-reproach to Phil Carter, who could not understand it, and listened to its utterance rather as if it were a reflection on Providence, that had loaded Charlie with benefits, than a reflection on Charlie's own misconduct. It would have demanded an exercise of reasoning powers beyond those at the disposal of Charlie to convince Phil that his friend's heart was likely to be consumed by a gnawing remorse at the recollection of the way he had treated his father eight years ago. Of course, the death of a father is grievous—to doubt this fact would be to discredit a sentiment which the world has at all ages honoured. At the same time, Phil, though he had been forced to read some history at school, could not recollect any instance in which a prince on the day of his coronation had broken down through grief at the thought

of the late monarch. The decease of any relative is undoubtedly a cause for grief, but Phil was one of those sanguine spirits who believe that there is a silver lining to every cloud. It was his impression that time, if employed in the spending of a deceased relative's money, should be looked upon as a great healer of grief.

"Yes, I'll buy a ship, but not for myself, my boy," said Charlie. "I'll buy one, and the name signed at the foot of the master's agreement will be Philip Carter, Master Mariner. That is the first use I will make of some of my money."

"Bravo!" cried Phil. "I'll keep you to your word, you may depend upon it; and the name of the ship shall be the *New Jessica*."

"Would you like it built on the Tyne or the Clyde, old boy?" asked Charlie; but before the other could reply in the same

strain, one of the stewards came up with a message to Charlie, from Mr. Longwood, asking him if he would be good enough to go for a short time to the cabin Mr. Longwood occupied. Charlie replied that he would go without delay. But so soon as the messenger had departed, the first consciousness of being the possessor of riches was experienced by the young man.

"I say, Phil," he said, rising, "isn't it disgusting to be obliged to wear an old jacket like this instead of some respectable clothes? It's uncommonly unlucky that nothing was saved."

Phil laughed outright. "Why, you have worn that jacket for ever so long without a single complaint," he said. "Why should you feel now, more than at any other time, disgusted with your hard fate? Oh, Charlie, Charlie, this money, it makes the very best fellow conceited."

"You know jolly well I'm not conceited," Charlie replied, with a blush. "I'm sure it's natural that a fellow should get tired after awhile of an old coat, and this is confoundedly old."

"Well, yes, it looks as if it had been born at an advanced age, and has been getting older and older ever since. However, as Miss Longwood has seen you in no other, I daresay she'll excuse it for your sake."

"Miss Longwood? What do you mean, Phil?" asked Charlie, with a still deeper blush.

"Why, aren't you summoned to see her?" said Phil.

"I'm asked to go to Mr. Longwood."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Phil with mock gravity. "What a mistake a fellow may fall into through not hearing a word pronounced distinctly. Of course you will

only see Mr. Longwood; there is not the remotest chance of your catching a stray glimpse of Miss Longwood."

Charlie hastened off, leaving the speaker in a fit of laughter.

CHAPTER XV.

CHARLIE had scarcely time to collect his thoughts before he went aft to Mr. Longwood's cabin, and indeed the change that had come over his life and prospects was so great as to require a considerable time for the gathering together of his ideas. Strange to say, the first consciousness that came to him was that his entire morning had been wasted. That difficult composition he had got through with such trouble might now be thrown into the sea—it was worthless now. He lifted it from the place where he had laid it, and he opened it and read it again. How stupid and sentimental it seemed to him now! He was disgusted with himself for having ever written it, and he had real satisfaction in tearing the sheet

to pieces, and sending it in that form into the midst of a shoal of flying-fish.

And then what a feeling of dear delight came over him as he thought of that girl, to him peerless in beauty and grace, who had been ready to prove that she loved him for himself alone. Poor though he was, and, so far as it was possible for her to know, not beyond the ordinary standing of a seaman, this girl, with wealth and beauty and friends, had given him the inestimable treasure of her love. He thought over this, that appeared so wonderful to him, for a long time, until—well, it must be confessed—his eyes were full of tears, but he really could arrive at no conclusion as to why such an extraordinary thing had taken place. He could, no doubt, enjoy its results as intensely without knowing anything about what had caused them, just as he could appreciate the perfume of

a rose though he might never know the petals from the stamens.

He never at any time had believed that he would inherit a fraction of his father's wealth. His father, he knew, had been rich, for he had a large practice in the town of Dorminster, and his income was rapidly accumulating, or, in other words, his father had been inclined to be miserly in his expenditure. And yet he had died without making any will. This was astonishing to his son, who expected only to be disinherited in the most emphatic manner possible.

It was a small consolation to Charlie to reflect, not only that his father had never executed his threat of disinheriting him, but that probably the father's heart had long ago softened towards the son knocking about the world out of the elder man's knowledge and beyond his reach, though Mr. Barton had made no other sign. As

he sat in his cabin for a few minutes endeavouring to compose himself, Charlie felt hopeful that this had indeed been the case. He was forced to acknowledge to his conscience that he had not treated his father well—that he had, in fact, treated him very badly, and this consciousness was intensified by the difficulty he experienced in bringing himself up to the point of grief that the occasion demanded. "Some natural tears he shed, but wiped them soon," very soon, for he recollected his engagement with Mr. Longwood.

He went to Mr. Longwood's cabin, wondering if that gentleman had had a conversation with his daughter since the previous evening. In that case, had Mr. Longwood summoned Charlie to express the indignation of the usual father-in-law of books at the youth's presumption in aspiring to the hand of the lady?

The questions that suggested themselves to Charlie Barton were soon answered. He was walking along the passage to the cabin, when the door of the neighbouring state-room opened gently, and a little hand was held out as a semaphore to interrupt his progress. He clasped the hand in his own in passionate delight.

"Papa knows nothing," came a whispered voice. "He wishes to speak with you about something else. Try and agree with him, will you not, for my sake?"

"For your sake," he whispered in return. "I wish I had something more difficult to do for your sake than agreeing with your father."

"You have done everything for me," she whispered. "You have made me the happiest of the happy."

Fearful of the inquisitive eyes of some of the steward's assistants, Charlie could

only bend his head down until his lips were upon the hand that trembled within his grasp. Then he knocked at Mr. Longwood's cabin door and was admitted.

"Ah, Mr. Brown, how do you do this morning?" said Mr. Longwood, from his berth.

"I beg you will pardon me, Mr. Longwood," the young man remarked, after he had replied to the greeting. "I beg you will pardon the deception I have so long practised upon you with regard to my name. I should have told you long ago that my name was Barton, not Brown; I took the latter name at the suggestion of that scoundrel."

"I will have quite as much pleasure in calling you Barton as I had in calling you Brown," said the gentleman, smiling. "Well, Mr. Barton, I have got a few words to say to you. Am I right in thinking

that you have seen enough of sea life to satisfy you ? ”

“ I admit, sir, that I had made up my mind to give up the sea as an occupation.”

“ Ah, I thought you had got enough of it. It is a laborious profession, and by no means a remunerative one. Well, you will not, I hope, fancy that I feel the less regard for you, or think the less highly of you, when I say that I do not suppose you are at present possessed of more wealth than could be represented by a silver sixpence. Eh, what answer do you give me to that ? ” and Mr. Longwood laughed good-naturedly. Charlie smiled.

“ On the contrary, Mr. Longwood,” he said, quietly, “ I may tell you that I am worth a good many sixpences ; I cannot mention the exact extent of my income, but one of my properties in England amounted, I was informed some years ago, to fifteen

hundred pounds a year. I am sorry I cannot say what I have invested in home and foreign securities, but I am inclined to think that I have a good many loose thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, floating in that way. It may be unseamanlike to call what is in the Stocks floating; however, that's the land phrase, I believe."

Mr. Longwood stared at the young man, and appeared to be under the impression that he had become suddenly and seriously wrong in his mind.

"I hardly understand you, my lad," he said. "You are talking enigmatically, no doubt. You mean, probably, that if you live you may work until you gain so much wealth."

"My dear sir, I mean no such thing," Charlie replied; "my statement can be taken literally. I am a rich man instead of being a poor one. I will be frank with

you, Mr. Longwood: only half an hour ago I found out that I am heir-at-law to all my father's property. Here is the paper that I borrowed by chance," and he pointed out the paragraph.

Mr. Longwood read the advertisement.

"My dear boy," he cried, starting up in his berth and stretching out his hand, "no one could be happier than I am to hear of this. I know something of the extent of your good qualities—your bravery, your generosity. I know how I could trust you, for I had asked you to come to me now in order that I might propose to you throwing up your profession as a mariner and accepting the gift of a junior partnership in the mercantile house to which I belong in England. Yes, I had so much confidence in you, I felt that I would be justified in making you the offer."

Charlie stood up.

"You felt that you could trust me?" he said, eagerly. "How far could you trust me, sir?"

"How far? My boy, I feel that I could trust you with everything that I possess—with all that I hold dear."

"With the keeping of your daughter's happiness?" cried Charlie.

Mr. Longwood gave another start, and there was a long pause before he said, quietly,

"Why do you ask me this question, Mr. Barton?"

"Because I came here to ask it of you, sir. Because, unless you answer it favourably, I feel that I had been better left to burn with the burning ship or to perish on the raft."

"My dear boy, I, for my part, could give you an answer to satisfy you, I know, but to do so would be to raise up false

hopes in your heart. You do not know my daughter, Barton ; I could trust her happiness in your keeping, but that would have no effect with her. I do not think she will ever care for anyone sufficiently to accept him. She has had repeated offers of marriage from the most eligible men that could possibly have been chosen for her, and yet she has refused them all. Ah, I grieve for you, indeed, if you have been so unfortunate as to allow yourself to form an attachment for Winny, though she is the best girl in the world."

"She is alone in the world for goodness and tenderness," cried Charlie. "Mr. Longwood, when she supposed, as she does still, that I was without a penny in the world she listened to my words of love, and she confessed, God bless her, that she returned my affection. Now I ask you, sir, can you trust me with her happiness?"

Mr. Longwood stretched out his hand.

"My boy—my son, indeed; I do not doubt that you speak the truth; I have never felt so happy in all my life. Go for her, bring her to me." He turned his head aside, and Charlie knew that it was to hide his tears of happiness.

It was not long before Winifred Longwood was brought, blushing, into her father's presence, where she became aware, for the first time, that the man to whom she had promised her love was her equal in position and in fortune. She did not receive the intelligence with any great show of joy, the fact being that the fullness of her gift seemed to her somewhat lessened now that she had learned her lover was not penniless. She was like most properly-constituted women, inclined to look at the romantic side of everything, and it could scarcely be denied that the

romance of her attachment to Charlie Barton was considerably impaired when she came to know of the equality of their social positions. Her father, however, like most fathers, was rather disposed to look at the commonplace side of things, especially of love affairs. He was certainly more impressed by the eligibility of Charlie as a son-in-law with a fortune than without one.

What words were spoken or what arrangements were made in that cabin of H.M. gunboat *Cockroach* may not be divulged; it must be sufficient to mention that an hour afterwards Miss Longwood and Charlie Barton went together upon the deck and stood talking under the awning for a short time, apparently in good spirits, a circumstance that was remarked by the doctor, who was smoking amidships, by the second lieutenant, who was on the bridge,

and by the senior midshipman, who was taking an observation with his sextant.

When Charlie said good-morning to the young lady and retired to the cabin he shared with Phil Carter, sundry mental notes were taken by each of the three officers just alluded to.

"Deucedly confidential she is with that mate fellow," muttered the lieutenant on the bridge.

"How can she talk to that low idiot?" murmured the midshipman.

"I'll pump that young man to-morrow," remarked the doctor to himself.

The next day the same three gentlemen observed a repetition of the scene between Miss Longwood and Charlie. He had been in Mr. Longwood's cabin and came up with the girl, by whose side he stood for nearly half an hour before he went forward.

"In that miserable ship, I suppose, they

were all thrown together," said the first to himself.

"That cad should remember his position," remarked the second.

"Good girl she is—so condescending to that fellow," observed the third.

That evening Charlie was smoking one of Mr. Longwood's cigars, amidships, when the doctor sauntered up to him.

"Ah, how do you feel to-day, my young friend?" he asked, in a patronizing way.

"I feel extremely well, thank you," said Charlie. "I hope you are in the same excellent health, sir."

"Oh, I'm all right, my lad. How do you like this sort of life? Rather a change from the hard work aboard a lubberly merchantman?"

"I would as soon have a little more to do here," said Charlie. "This seems the longest voyage I ever took."

"Ah, no doubt; there is nothing like good hard work for everybody. By the way, you seem on the most confidential terms with Mr. Longwood. Fine old boy—lots of tin, I hear."

"I hope you will soon be able to bring him back to health, sir," said Charlie, evading the other questions of the doctor.

"Ah, yes, all in good time. The daughter is a fine girl, isn't she? Well, I see, by the way you look at me, you guess what I would be at. Yes, it's a fact, my lad; I don't mind confessing it to you; I'm a gone coon with that girl, and I want you to do something for me as regards her. I want you to drop a hint to her to this effect. I'm not conceited, but I'm pretty sure she has more than a passing regard for me. You have heard her speak, what do you say on this subject, eh?"

"I say that she has no more regard for

you in the way you mean than she has for the cook, sir," Charlie replied, coolly.

"What do you mean, you insolent fellow?" cried the doctor, starting up. "Bah! you're beneath my notice. This is what I gain by condescending to talk with a common fellow that has never seen or known anything." And he walked away enraged.

This interesting interview was noticed by the lieutenant, who was off watch, and he immediately came up to Charlie, smiling.

"Our good friend, the doctor, is cut up by something you have said to him," he remarked, with a laugh.

"Very likely, sir."

"He is a vain, conceited fellow, that doctor," continued the lieutenant. "I have had experience of him. He fancies, for instance, that every girl who sees him falls

in love with him. Quite ridiculous, isn't it?"

"Quite ridiculous."

"I'm glad you agree with me. Now, I daresay he was talking to you about Miss Longwood, was he not?"

"It is of no consequence, sir."

"Of course not; no, not of the least. The young lady does not care a brass farthing for him, I know. The fact is, my dear fellow, I have given that young lady to understand, in a variety of ways, which she could not fail to perceive, that all I have is ready to be laid at her feet. I believe that she has a large fortune, but I do not consider that in the least."

"Well, sir, what is all this to me?" asked Charlie.

"Nothing — oh, of course, nothing," said the lieutenant, smiling vaguely. "Only I was under the impression that you might

have heard either her father or herself mention my name—that, in fact, you could give me a wrinkle whether you think I should do well to declare my attachment to her without delay."

"Well, sir, since you ask me, I must tell you that, in my opinion, you will gain nothing if you were to wait till doomsday."

"Oh, you think I should not delay?"

"I didn't say that, sir. I only said you would gain nothing by waiting; but, for that matter, you will gain just as little by immediate action."

"You don't presume to say——"

"It's no presumption to answer a question that one has been asked, and I have done nothing more," said Charlie. "Good-evening."

He took off his cap and walked to the forward part of the ship; but he had

scarcely got the length of his own cabin before he was met by Mr. Hornby, the senior midshipman.

"I say, Brown, I want to speak to you," said this young man, confidentially.

"Very well," answered Charlie. "I'm here."

"Yes; but I want to say something to you in private. Come this way for a minute."

Charlie wondered, as he followed the young man, if the whole of the ship's company were desirous of having private conversations with him.

"The fact is," continued the midshipman, when they were in a retired place, "I wanted to tell you that my promotion is on its way out from England at present. I thought you would like to hear that I shall be second lieutenant in a month."

"I congratulate you with all my heart,"

said Charlie. "I'm sure you deserve the promotion."

"Ah, I knew you would be glad to hear it," repeated the other, with a little hesitation in his voice. Then there was a pause.

"Yes, I'm very glad indeed. Good-evening," said Charlie, about to move off.

"Stay for a moment, Brown," said the midshipman. "I see you sometimes speaking to—to—ah, Miss Longwood; now would you mind saying to her that I shall have my promotion in a month? I don't like speaking about it myself."

"I shall be very happy to do so, Mr. Hornby."

"And, I say, Brown, if you could manage to add that I have capital prospects, I'd be obliged to you. I have, you know."

"I will do so, I promise you."

"Thank you, my dear fellow. By the

way, do you think you could contrive to drop a hint to Miss Longwood that I'm—I'm—that is—I admire her very much."

"I shall indeed," said Charlie, laughing. "I'll tell her that you admire her."

"Oh, thank you; tell her that I'm—I'm only waiting for my promotion, to ask her permission to speak to her father."

"Why, she will be delighted to let you speak to her father at any time," said Charlie.

"Do you really think so?" cried the other. "You know what I mean. I mean to ask her father's permission to speak to her."

"No, you told me just now it was her permission to speak to her father you wanted."

"Yes, yes; it's all the same. You know that I mean to—to propose for her—now you have the plain truth."

" And very plain it is—almost ugly."

" Eh, what, do you think I shouldn't have some chance ? "

" Well, as to that, I should like to ask you a few questions. You are not yet of age ? "

" Not for two years."

" But then you will have an estate, no doubt ? "

" No, confound it, I'm the youngest of nine boys. But the girl will have a pot of money, won't she ? "

" It is generally understood," said Charlie. " And would you be content to live upon her money ? "

" Why, what else should I do with it ? "

" Then I may as well tell you, Mr. Hornby, there are several reasons why Miss Longwood would not listen to you. To name one of the chief reasons, I may tell you that, rich as Miss Longwood is herself,

she is determined never to marry any save a rich man. And another reason is that Miss Longwood is already engaged."

"By Jove, it can't be possible—she—engaged! Do you know this for a fact?"

"For a fact."

"Some one aboard this ship?"

"I confess you are right."

"Not that confounded doctor, surely?"

"No, not the doctor."

"Oh, hang it all. Then the lieutenant has been before us—he has cut us both out."

"I can tell you for certain, it is not the second lieutenant."

"Not the second lieutenant? But there's nobody else aboard the ship. The captain is married, and so is the first lieutenant. There's no one else."

"Ah, there I differ from you, Mr. Hornby," said Charlie. "The fact is, I'm

presumptuous enough to think myself somebody—not anybody of great importance, to be sure, but still somebody."

"Do you mean to say that she is engaged to you—you?"

"I do mean to say it, Mr. Hornby. I don't wonder at your astonishment; I was as surprised myself when she accepted me; I know my own unworthiness."

"But you are only a mate of a merchantman—I don't mean to put a slight upon you, but you know you told me Miss Longwood would only engage herself to a rich man."

"It so happens," said Charlie, quietly, "that I have a pretty fair income apart from what I may earn as mate of a ship. I can't tell you exactly how much I have, but I can assure you it may be measured by thousands, not hundreds."

The young man stared at him.

"This is the rummest thing I ever heard," he said at length. "Well, never mind, I think you're a decent fellow, and—some girls are queer. At any rate, if I have lost her, neither of the other men here has cut me out, that's one comfort. Hang it, I'll go and tell them all. You'll see how they will be sold." And he hurried off to impart his information to the doctor and the second lieutenant.

It is unnecessary to say more about their mode of receiving the news, except that they shook hands together and became friends again over the grief that was common to all of them, and so the feud that had for some days disturbed the goodwill of the ward-room came to an end, and the pipe of peace was smoked after mess, while the peculiar taste of the young lady was discussed.

It did not take long for the news to

spread that one of the men who had been picked up from the raft was as rich as a Rothschild, and was only waiting for the gunboat to reach Melbourne to be married to the beautiful lady-passenger in the cabin. The commander spoke very kindly to Charlie, congratulating him upon his fortune, and Mr. Stephens did the same. It is unnecessary to say how delighted Phil Carter was to hear of his friend's engagement to Miss Longwood.

When at length the news reached the steward's pantry, where Patsy was engaged working his way back to Melbourne, the Irishman gave an exclamation of wonder. His only commentary, however, was expressed in the words, "Well, me boys, all I can say is, if he makes as good a mate to the young woman as he did to the ship *Jessica*, it's lucky she'll be."

The conclusion of all may briefly be

told. The gunboat arrived in due time at Melbourne, and the report of the commander was made to the authorities. Mr. Longwood, who was now completely recovered, told his story, which was repeated by the boatswain and Charlie, and, in fact, all those who remained from the ill-fated *Jessica*.

Charlie telegraphed to the trustees of his father's property to the effect that he would return to England with as little delay as possible. Mr. Longwood placed his bank-book at his disposal until a remittance could arrive. In a week from this time Charlie Barton and Winifred Longwood were married in Melbourne, and in another fortnight they started for England by one of the ocean steamers, Mr. Longwood accompanying them, and also Phil Carter and Patsy, Phil ready for his certificate to be in a position to take com-

mand of the ship Charlie had promised him so soon as it could be built.

The steamer arrived in good time, and without a mishap, and Charlie, with his wife and her father, proceeded at once to Dorminster, where the trustees of the property left by Mr. Barton resided. Charlie then ascertained how it came about that his father had died leaving no will. It seemed that a will had been written out, in which his son had been disinherited; but years before his death Mr. Barton had relented. He had destroyed the document. Latterly he had been talking with his partner about the terms of a fresh will, in which his son, if still alive, should be his heir, when he had a severe attack of paralysis, from which he never recovered. It had been impossible for him, under these circumstances, to put his purpose into execution. But Charlie being the heir to the property, the

trustees had caused advertisements to be inserted in all the Australian and New Zealand papers, asking for information as to his whereabouts. That one of these was seen by the person for whom it was designed is already known to the reader.

The property Charlie found to be equal to two thousand a year, and there was upon one of the small estates a manor-house surrounded by some excellent preserves. Here the young people took up their residence, with Mr. Longwood as a perpetual guest. Though the life of a country gentleman was at first a little flat to one who had led such an active career as Charlie, yet he soon settled down, as people call the process of contentment; and with his tenants and his workpeople, his guns and his horses, he soon found himself more busy than he had ever been before.

It was on the terrace of the manor-house

that, one July evening, two years after their arrival in England, Charlie Barton and his wife were sitting after dinner watching the sunset reddening the leaves in the neighbouring woods. Perhaps it was the lurid tropical glow that made their memories go back to those days of the great calm in which the *Jessica* had lain motionless for so long a period. They began to talk of those days, though they seemed now no more than dream-memories. Suddenly the couple heard the sound of footsteps coming up the avenue, and looking round they saw a tall bronze-faced man advancing towards them.

"Is it possible? Phil Carter!" cried Charlie, jumping up. "My dear fellow, I am delighted to see you. I did not expect you for another month."

"I didn't expect to be here for a fortnight, at any rate," Phil replied, after he had shaken hands with Mrs. Barton; "but

the *Jessica* will do anything. By George there never was a ship like her. Thirty-one days from the Cape. That's as good as a race-horse, Mrs. Barton. She bates everything, as our steward Patsy would say."

"You will stay with us a month, old fellow," said Charlie. "You promised last voyage that you would."

"And I mean to keep my promise, Charlie; for my share of the last run is something considerable, I can tell you. And so you live here all alone?"

"Oh no, we have papa with us," said Mrs. Barton. "Oh, here he comes, with——"

"Bless my soul, what's this?" cried Phil, starting back, as Mr. Longwood advanced with something white on his shoulder. "I declare it's a baby—a fine, fat, crowing baby-girl, as like Charlie as

two Union Jacks. And what might its name be, Charlie?"

"Ask it," said Charlie, laughing.

"Come, old woman, tell us what your pretty little name is?" said Phil, snapping his fingers at the chubby little face.

The child looked at him curiously for a moment, with wide blue eyes, and then lisped:

"Mammy ca' baby her Jess'ca."

THE END.

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